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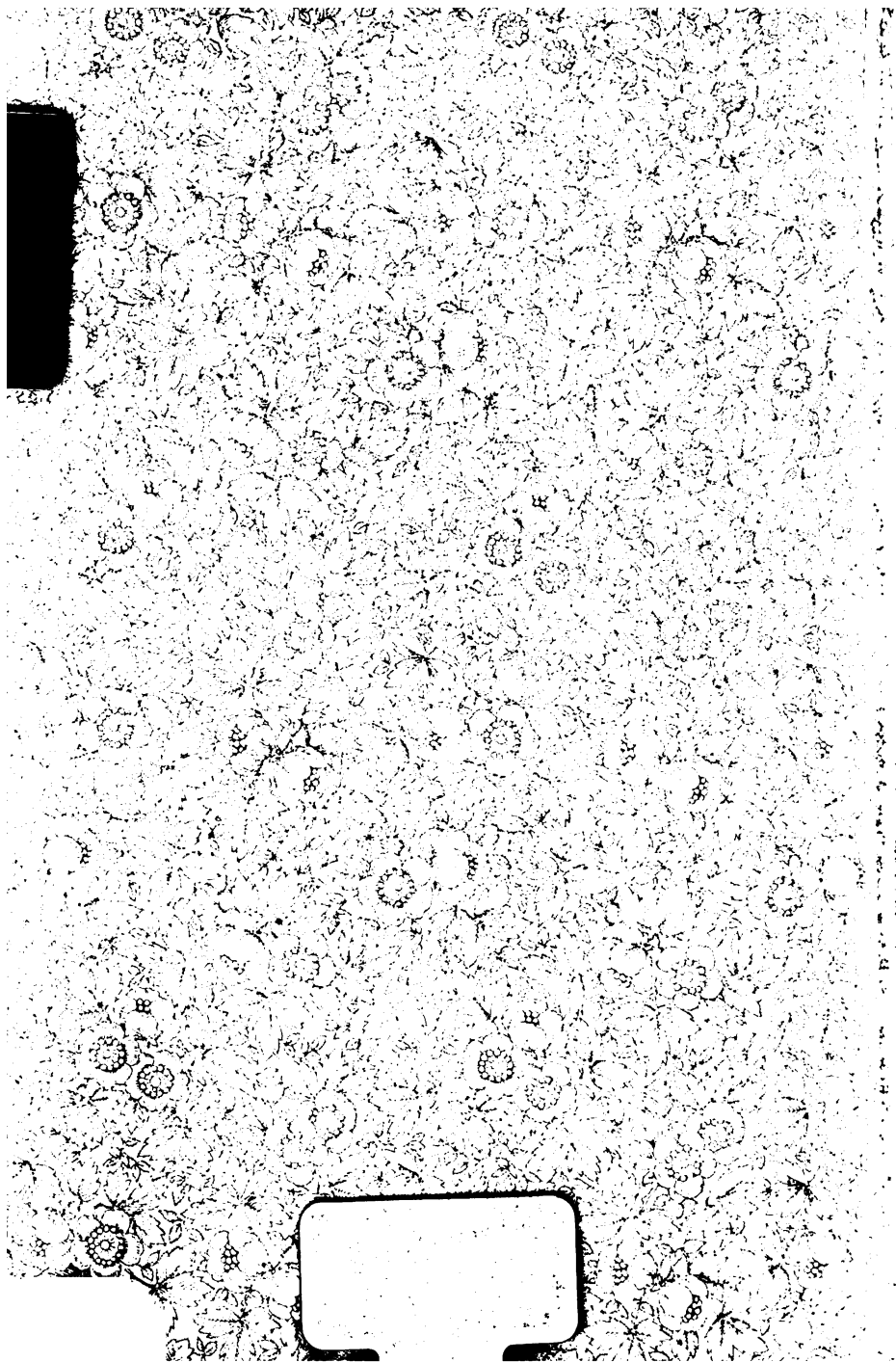
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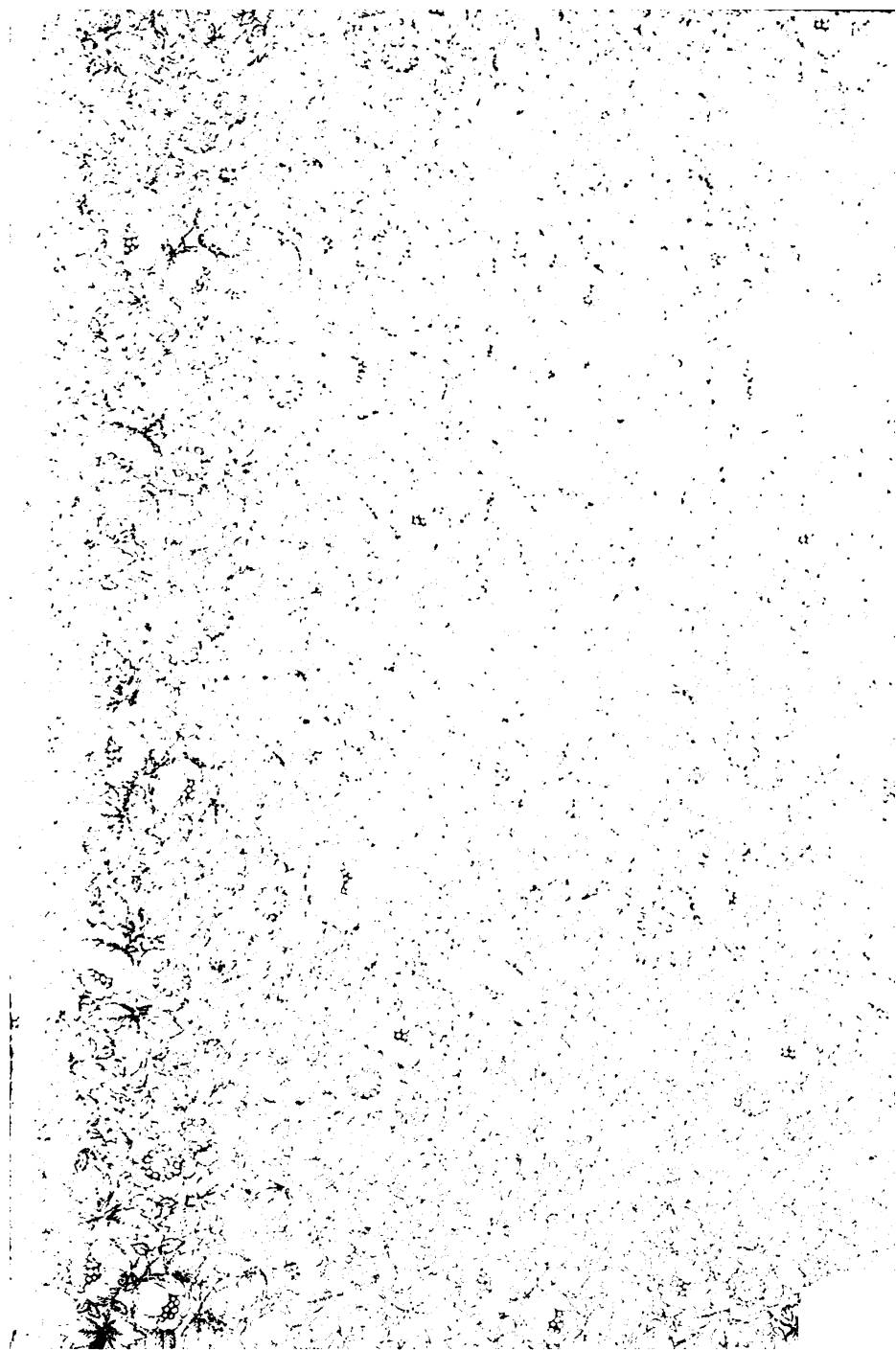


# STRANGE CHAPMAN

BY WILLIAM BAKER









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**STRANGE CHAPMAN.**

**VOL. I.**



# STRANGE CHAPMAN

A NORTH OF ENGLAND STORY

BY

W. MARSHALL, B.A.

AUTHOR OF

“MONSELL DIGBY.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1882.

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251. i. 589.





# STRANGE CHAPMAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### COLONIAL.

“WELL!”

A sorrowful gesture.

“Is he gone, Biddy?”

“Yis, sur-r.”

“Ah!” A deep breath, neither sigh nor surprise, a long low groan through closed lips, relief alike to mind and chest. Then profound thought, as of one travelling far backward or forward, handling a dark matter in the deeper soul.

She is standing with her fat hand on the door-latch, this middle-aged serving-woman, interest on her face that banishes the long

weariness, a gleg of mischief in her eye that imparts a spice of malice to her keen, inquisitorial look.

Still he sits, unwitting of that secret chuckling something within the woman, a flush of excitement on his prone countenance, thinking—thinking sadly, it may be, but assuredly very deeply.

A shuffle of shoes, a rub of clothes, a little sigh, and instantly that knowing gaze gives place to a demure, stony, stupid expression as he looks up.

“Did he go quietly, Biddy?”

“’Deed he did, sur-r; loike a choild, loike swate Miss Beaty going to slape.”

“H’m-m!” A shake of the head and thought again, as the face settles on the hands, the arms on the knees, the eye fixed in floorward stare.

A moment she looks at him, a moment there flashes up a triumphant light in her eye, banishing the stolid expression; then weariness seems to supervene, like gloom after a midnight rocket, and she silently withdraws.

“It’s himself that thinks he’ll be the bettther for this, the harrud crayther, an’ it’s meself

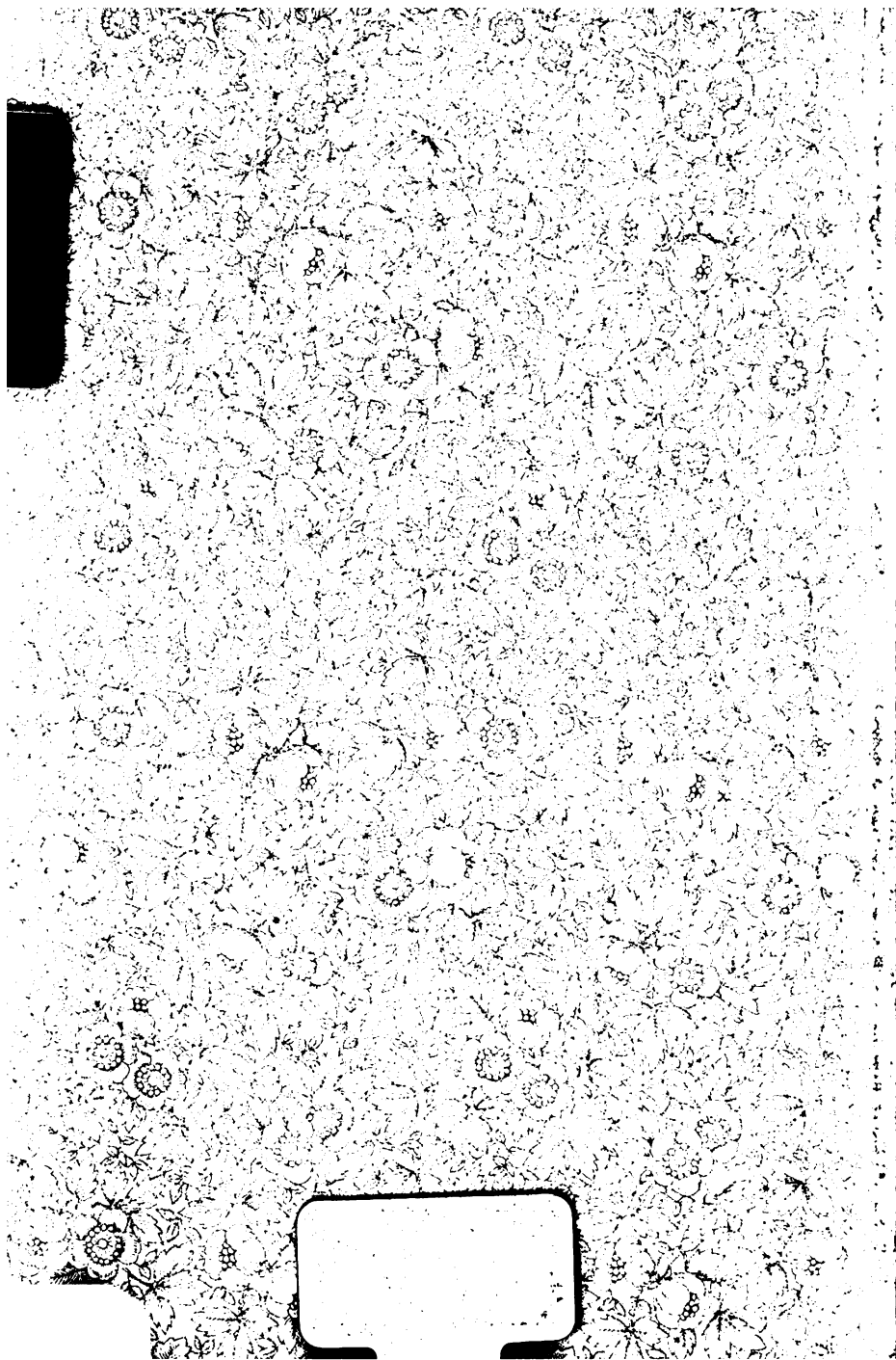
that's put a spoke in his wheel for trateing missis so cold. But, musha, oi must have something to dhrink, for oi'm desthroyed entoirely. The wautching was taydeous beyond iverything."

In awhile the gentleman rouses up from his sorrow, or his meditations, and takes from a drawer a black-sealed packet.

"To be opened after my death. J. C." is inscribed upon it.

He breaks the seal and reads with great attention, his swarthy countenance lighting up with a flash of interest or glooming again with a suggestion of disappointment. He puts down the documents and walks up and down the room, his head bent forward, his hands folded behind him. His satisfactions are clearly very mixed, very alloyed. He sits down again, reads, re-reads, ponders, until the folios drop from hand to knee, from knee to carpet, while he knows it not, the large white eyes fixing on the opposite wall, the big person rigid as a frozen traveller in the morgue at St. Bernard's.

He might be mentally forming figures, patterns, vortices out of the dancing motes in that shaft of sunbeam. Scheme might be revolving



in it, nor any of his own family's, nor his wi—I mean that person's relations. And a deed of gift, too! Not a will needing proving, registering, and so forth, letting everybody know. Fortunate that," &c., &c.

Gradually his brow clears with a conclusion.

"I'll leave the colony, and go to Dewsey Manor. Nellie will like it; and, if she doesn't, well—" and he shakes his head like a fate.

An idea now enters his mind that he has somewhat neglected hostly duties. He rings with severity the bell.

"Send Biddy here."

"Biddy's aslape, yer honour, wid fattaygue," replies a help from Erin.

"Is *that* it?" There is a warning note in the voice, a hard, suspicious look on his face.

"Shure, yer honour——"

"Now mind."

"Well, thin, yer honour, it isn't desayving ye that o'll be. Biddy had such a pain in her insoide wid the wor-rk all day an' noight that she tuk a sthrong dhram, an' she's stretched clean dhrunk on her bed, so the poor crayther is."



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STRANGE CHAPMAN.

VOL. I.



inn, while he rode up country. Could it be that they were going to return to the old squire-like conditions of earlier days in old Suffolk?—"Silly Suffolk," as some dared to call it, but the dearest spot on earth to Eleanor Mumford. Something surely was in progress, or why that absorbed look in John which was never seen except when he had got some purpose which he was determined to carry, and which, for anything she knew, he was at that very moment effecting somewhere in city or bush. She must bide her time here at the tavern until he chose to disclose his plans.

It might be trying, but she was only being tried where she was strong. A patient, gentle, little woman was Eleanor Mumford, one whose footfall was silent in the house, and her voice not loudly heard; an essence rather than a presence where her lord appeared; and yet one of those whom rough, loud men in their deepest hearts often thank God for sending; a ruler in her own way; a woman gifted to get inside shut souls, and silently to nestle there in gentle word or voice as a wholesome power when they know it not.

That large, pale brow, ovalled by its setting of fair hair tired Madonna-wise, that quiet, inquiring eye, that calm, forbearing face, those little hands that clasped so resignedly on her lap, when she bore the gale of her husband's strong self-will, those measured words were not lost altogether upon him, even when he seemed to pass her prudent expostulations by with his impatient "tut, tut." Nor was she without evidence that her words had told on his conduct even when he had seemed to laugh at her fears or suggestions. There was often something of change in direction or of toning down in expression to show that the self-contained man had let another voice be heard in the wilful mind. The queens of the settlements around—near neighbours and adverse critics of ten and twenty miles away—might say she was "a poor little thing," and that, if they were in her place, Mumford should hear them "sound their horn," or "they'd die for it;" but it was not clear that her method was less powerful than theirs. True, she was not mistress of her servants—the most vicious Semiramis of the squatting stations was not that—but she could

keep them about her when others could not. And, if she had to bear with disobedience from Biddy, especially when she got a trifle elevated, yet Biddy rated stockman and shepherd roundly if they neglected "the mistress's" quiet little commands, and allowed none to disobey her but herself.

She had married for love, had given everything for very little of the same commodity in return, as some are doomed to do, and had come ten years ago a timorous young bride from an ancestral home to this rough land. Amid those grassy plains and shadowy gum-tree forests the girl had shrunk within herself more and more. Spontaneity had retreated into timid reserve, and reticence into restraint, until the frank bearing of gentlehood had been changing into the distrustful shyness of one who was weaning from the world, or knew it not. Her lord was not master of the art of divining her secret ailment. The lute was full of music, but he knew not how to sound a single stop, and scarcely seemed to care. Her languid manner he put down to home-sickness, when a little of manly cherishing would have made the

whole world a home so that he were there. Her growing diffidence he divined with far more skill. That old-maidish manner, which was coming over her like a thin mist, he knew would disappear ; but as yet, for six years, they had had no promise of a child. Then the joyous presage was received, and, when the seventh year of exile closed, a little voice was heard in the house. Another eighteen months, and Millie joined Beaty, and soon two little pairs of feet had begun to drum on her knees. Anon there were two little hearts nestling consciously to her own ; two little pairs of feet were pattering on the stairs ; two little tongues telling in chant or dirge the childly joys or woes ; two little moving pictures ever at their office of restoring the fading memories of her own childhood, the innocence and joyous hope of life's early spring.

Mooranga, with its long rows of cattle-sheds, its stockades and store-houses, its homely log dwellings, adorned only with such nicknacks of feminine taste as she had been able to contribute, was now a different place to her. The plains around were sunnier, the solemn mystery

of the great woods less weird, the roll and rush of the Murrumbidgee near not half so companionable to her soul as the two little heart-warmers scampering over the grass or lying like stilled seraphs in their little snowy cots. Sweet, genial, dignified matronhood infused into her manner, and effervesced in rippling smile or low, cadenzaed laugh which banished the old air of restraint, and broke the crust of the old reserved demeanour. Nevertheless, she was not altogether as others; not like gossipy Mrs. Jones, who declared her stiff; nor like gushing Mrs. Brown, who said she was proud; nor like familiar Mrs. Stubbs, who felt repelled by her quiet civility, and considered that she thought too much of herself now that "the run" was turning out so well; whereas, if everyone was fairly reckoned up, some people were as good as some other people, and a good deal better, &c., &c.

Two or three placid years went by swiftly in the novel pleasures of this new-found existence, and then a fear fell upon her. Were these children to have no other advantages than what pertained to this lonely ranche, small with all

that she could do, but oh ! how ineffably smaller if she should be taken away. It came at first as a vague doubt, a thin, ghostly fear, but it boded change into a crystallised alarm. Often, when she had gone into their night-nursery, and soothed herself in her husband's long absences by looking at the little peaceful sleepers and kissing them doubly and trebly in rapture tremulous, had the vision of these possibilities chilled on her mind. And more and more powerfully fell the fear upon her as the months flew by.

But a delightful word had reached her amid these boding disquiets. Mr. James Chapman, an old friend of her husband's, a refined and travelled man, was coming out for the sake of his health, and would join them as a guest ; perhaps, if the climate suited him, as a partner in the "run." Very pleasant was that prospect to all of them. Very earnest was the preparation, very heavy the rubbing up and cleaning down to make all "nice." A velvet softness of content, a stray visitor there, had come over John's face ; a very planning, thoughtful one over his wife's, and a very hot one over the

toiling servants'. At last everything was ready, and the merry party jolted down to the capital in their waggon, heedless of the long roadless ways, jocose over the mishaps in crossing gully and creek, fascinated with city life when they got there, positively bewitched with the charms of shopping and "trying on;" for John had bidden his wife to stint nothing, and apparel herself, Biddy, and the bairns handsomely.

And then, arrayed in splendour, the bonny weans, the very pattern of chubby, childly beauty, in their white frocks and pink sashes, Biddy herself, in high-toned glory, following with a hand of each in her own, behind their parents, they had all boarded the *Staffa* to meet their expected friend. But cold indeed was the chill which fell on them when they saw him not on the deck.

"Are you Mr. Mumford, sir?"

It was the captain, with a solemn countenance.

"I regret to say, sir——"

They followed him down to the little berth where the languid form was laid, and the wan eyes, from the hollow, emaciated countenance,

gleamed feverishly upon them with a wistful, hungering look. A cold, steelly pang went to Eleanor's heart when she beheld that wasted form, that candle of life flickering out in its last spasmodic glimmer. A touch of the old boyish feeling came back to John's breast and eyes as he listened to those feeble tones, broken by the hacking cough, begging him to take him hence to his inn, nor leave him during the few hours that he had to live.

Not unsolemn was that dying man's petition to John to bring up his two beautiful children as he would his own, nurturing and teaching them well. Very painful, but deeply suggestive to Mrs. Mumford, was that long supplicating look, when he mentioned his brother Sylvester's name in connection with his boy and girl, saying, "if ever you should see him, will you—" a request cut short by the entrance of her husband, and never completed; for soon came on the thirty hours of swoon, and wandering words, and delirious drowse which portalled James Chapman into the Great Unseen.

In a little while they were struggling through the Eucalyptus woods, their bodies swathed in



black, their minds taking prismatic tinge from new hopes, for Mr. Mumford had found a customer for "the run," and had vouchsafed the clarion word "Home!"

## CHAPTER II.

## HOMEWARD HO!

THE clank of hoist and chain, the thud of box and bale dropping into the hold, the shouts of seamen, the rush of stevedores bearing luggage, the commands of blue-clad officers, the bewildered looks of ladies and children on the crowded deck ; below, hot people hunting after their berths, stewards and stewardesses looking hotter, roaring fires in the engine-room, coal-heavers, stokers, engineers, all busy on their vocations ; groups of friends on board, groups standing on shore ; all show that a great vessel is on the eve of a long voyage. It is the good ship *Marco Polo*, and she starts for Liverpool in two hours ; a swift boat, with a first-rate captain and crew. See with what a celerity they clear those encumbered decks of their moun-

tains of baggage and merchandise. Look with what a regularity the passengers stream on board. Mark them as they come, for they are not altogether of the common order. Here are men flushed with the rapid wealth of the gold fields; suttlers that have gleaned as rapidly a still fuller purse; squatters who have grown slowly, solidly rich; merchants, explorers, adventurers, victims. Pleasure is uppermost in many faces, hope in more, hurry in all.

There is one bent on the *grand tour*, and resolved, after the finest things of Europe are seen, to settle down somewhere at "home." Ah! how long in solitary hut has he dreamed of that! How frequently, on lonely twilight plains, yearned for the shadowy reward! There is another who will buy an estate—but where? This one has visions of a little dainty model farm, that of a villa in some pleasant watering-place, with a little fairy—still to be found—ruling it wisely and well. Here is one wearing a proud look, as he stands beside the burly countryman who has achieved a competency. And well he may. But two years ago he rushed hither in flight from a grave, and now he

returns stronger than ever. There is a couple that seem to cower out of sight. Poor things! they came out as first-class passengers and they go back in the steerage, their last penny invested therein.

And who are you, sir, with bag in hand?

How wistfully, as he comes on board, he looks about to see whom he does *not* know! How that gaze, which seemed to grow almost red rimmed in its eager intensity just now, softens down when he finds no "friend" to accost him there!

Ah! now that the last party has come on board, and they are casting the vessel off, how his cheerfulness battens on ignorance!

The face of this young man of twenty-five is of the smooth, mobile sort. It is weak in things hirsute, strong in an alluring, silky smile. A rich, glossy hair, well-pencilled brown eyebrows, eyes that are bright and quick, waiting, watching eyes, sometimes with a scrutinising alarm in them, sometimes with a pussified archness implying they are capable of the flattery of unspoken compliment. His voice is fine and richly modulated, and his bearing implies that

he had social privileges in early life, when they tell most vitally. He is little rather than than tall; furtive in manner rather than frank.

Is he a gentleman? Well, he is, and he is not. He has had advantages which ought to make a man that. He has an undertoned shadow on his face, a second light in his eye, dark depths apparently in the stream of being, while the surface is mellowing or glittering in sunshine, which might make the sagacious man or the pure-minded maiden deny chivalry to him.

Is he a detective? He might be, for he certainly believes at this moment that the proper study of mankind is man, as he stands there, half hidden in a recess, scanning curiously every face.

Anyway, whatever he may be, the ladies will vote him nice, and he will earn much goodwill on the voyage. He is a man whom you can imagine hanging about a proud, imperious belle with soft, patient, unperturbed smile, deferential and suave, when she is in her little tiffs; or, lounging by the taff-rail, sympathetic

with her sunnier moods, an interested listener to anything she may condescend to say. You might imagine him waiting unwearied on a worry old lady, or beaming silently on the brayings of a choleric old gentleman with an unwholesome liver.

He appears particularly interested in the last party that came aboard. It almost seems providential that he has an opportunity of doing them a service directly they are on deck. A child is lost, "the little harrut-breaking colleen," as her nurse describes her, and he recovers the precious little waif and hands it to the nurse with such a sweet, lingering look and smile that they go at once to the roots of the warm, Irish spontaneities.

The mother of this little girl is rather short in stature, with a pale, patient face, redeemed by a fine spanse of forehead outlined by the fair Madonna hair. The father treads deck and earth as if his heel crushes and pulverises something of right; a strong, big man, with square face and shoulders. He lifts his hat, as if over-heated with his walk hither, and reveals a well-rounded head, thatched with sere, crisp,

flaxen hair that is worn cut quite close. The face suggests boyishness, and reflection shows you that it means hairlessness. The forehead is seamed, the nose is regular, the mouth straight, the thin lips, souring in their rims, are drawn tight over the strong, well-set teeth. The cheeks tend to square on the jaw-bone, giving the features a masculine, cold, and sceptical character.

Altogether it is a head of hard practicalities, one not given to idealisms or Utopian dreams. Those clear, whiteish eyes have in them something *per se* not severe nor repulsive, yet, like the light of a fine October day, bright but chill: not cold enough to repel nor warm enough to invite. And yet he can attract. The high, thin voice, the love of talk, the pert, pointed, shrewd remark, bring listeners around, when the strong, unmoved face and the inquiring, light, grey eye forbid intimacy and ignore cordiality. Life to him, it would seem, is a mart, and talk—as the means to knowledge, and knowledge to pelf—is a coin of its currency.

The pair, Mr. Dacre Mumford and his lady,

pass to their little state-room, the prompt manner and firm tread of the one as unlike the gentle deference of the other as his stature to hers.

The paddles turn at last. The white handkerchiefs flutter convulsively on shore, faces fade, figures lapse into the crowd, the crowd into a dark blot. Sydney, the Queen of the South, with her wondrous Botanical Gardens, her parks, and cathedrals are fading out of sight; Woolloomooloo, Port Jackson, and Cockatoo Island are in the rear, and that fairy land of rockwork,—fretted into headland, inlet and cove, vik and naze,—with two arms holds the dazzling blue on which, like a thing of life, the steamer walks.

Gazing on those fifty-four miles of coast beauty the Briton only sees one thing which his country can equal along that lovely fiord. Those lines and groups of dull green on shore are not tinted like the charming woods of his motherland. The forts are passed, the lighthouse on the Sow and Pigs, Pinchgut and Garden Islands, and the twin gateways of the glorious haven. The azure waves shade into those of the great



"wine dark mere," and the stormy Pacific rolls before them.

The three days' tempest are over, and Mr. Mumford glances from his book with a hard, scrutinizing look at the first pale-faced sufferers struggling to the deck. He has paid no forfeits to Neptune, and scarcely understands why anybody should, only he notices that they do. The captain hopes that the ladies are better, and the young officers are very polite to the pretty girls. Mr. Mumford is turning to his book again, when a suggestion about the weather, rather than a frank, outspoken opinion, reaches him. It is from a gentleman, sidling up with an air of deference. Mr. Mumford belongs to the approachable class, and prefers talk to reading. He prefers it because it is more malleable. A clever man can turn and shape it much at will. It is more instructive, he thinks, because you can get all sorts of tips out of it about practical matters, like markets, bargains, and business generally; lots of hints about people, their doings and belongings. It is far jollier, too. Your printer's devil takes the sparkle from the eye, the inflec-

tion from the voice, the innuendo from lip, face, and mein, and leaves you nothing but the dry husk of the matter; ay, and in the case of a fine woman he robs what she says of the ineffable grace and beautiful countenance that give such a charm to the utterances. But, best of all, you are rid of dictation. An author takes the bit in his teeth and bolts with you in whatever direction he chooses, and your only chance if you do not like it is to throw yourself out of the gig; whereas, in talk, you have got a nag broken to your hand, and, if you know how to drive, you can take any road that offers to your goal. Moreover, at sea, your book dances too much, while, on the other hand, talk seems to be the right thing, and there is endless time for it and constant opportunity.

The gentleman who accosts him has a tentative style; advancing remarks rather than making them, and watching furtively sideways to see how they take. Mr. Mumford's is of a bolder order. He has a bluff mode in giving, and a contradictory way of receiving observations; but the former falls short of dictation, and the latter has only so much of the spice of an-

tagonism as to stimulate talk with an appetiser for conflict. Mr. De Burgh might seem to be getting a little mauled in the mutual declarations of opinion, only the blows fall on him as on a cork in the water, and are well dodged. It works upon Mr. Mumford to find that he has met with a man who will not wince, and who still seems to hold his own when apparently defeated. Interest is clearly evoked when he is saying to himself, "What a queer little fellow! Always cool, however hard you hit him."

They begin to smoke together, have a rubber in the evenings, chat and walk on deck, and gradually grow distantly confidential. It dawns as gradually on Mr. Mumford's mind, but he can scarcely tell how, that Mr. De Burgh is hard up, has been in trouble, badly used perhaps, and generally is so ill-disposed to face his highly connected relatives at home that he would rather do anything else.

"Looks a sharp chap. Couldn't he do that business for me, if I promise to pay him well when it's done?" so ruminates Mr. Mumford as the *Marco Polo* disdainfully throws the long leagues behind her.

The ladies have long since voted Mr. De Burgh nice; so aristocratic in his manners; you can see the gentleman in every inch of him, and so on. But, strange to say, as Mr. Mumford has coldly warmed, Mrs. Mumford has warmly cooled towards him. She could not as yet give you a very satisfactory reason, but she has satisfied herself. She might point out that he was rather fond of heavy stakes at whist and loo, but were not many others of these rough *nouveaux riches* the same? She might say that he was making up too strongly, too clandestinely to Miss Rooney, the wealthy gold miner's daughter. Well, she was no chicken, and could take care of herself. *She* liked it. Besides, didn't other young men talk to her, and was not flirting on shipboard the most natural way of killing time to those who were not old? Well, yes; but his was different. Further, wasn't there a mystery about him which didn't seem satisfactory? Well, if you talk of mystery, what do you know about any one of these young fellows? Who are they, and what have they been at? Ah! well, they were not like him; you could make them

out. This man did not open up with knowing. They seemed as if they never cared what you knew about them, so it were true, but he did. Then again he was always on the look out to recommend himself. Psha! everybody is that in his own way.

"No, not like him. It's a business, Dacre, with him to get into other people's good books."

"Nonsense, Nellie. I'm afraid, unlike yourself, that you have taken against him because his manner is so much more refined than that of these other fellows."

"Well, it might be so. His hands showed that he hadn't touched hard colonial work. His manner showed that he hadn't been one of them. His conduct implied that he had something to hide, and his persistent attentions that he wished to find somebody to use for his own advantage. Altogether I don't like him, Dacre, and I shall be glad if you will have less to do with him."

"That's as may be, Nellie. There's something in what you say, but not enough to convince judge and jury. What I may have to do with him appertains primarily to *my* advan-

tage and only secondarily to his, and don't think I mean to be his victim. So you must leave me, Nellie, to pilot my own way."

"As I always have, Dacre," she says, with a meek reproach.

She is anxious to speak, for the silky little man brings a stifling atmosphere with him to her, and she wishes to see the last of him with the voyage. To-night men say the Scilly Isles and Cornwall may come into view; to-night tears of welcome, tender tears of reminiscence, will root in womanly eyes, and Hope will spread her wings as if for rapid flight to what she loves. The great vessel, like a racehorse nearing its goal, pants swiftly on with majestic speed as Mrs. Mumford sits in her little cabin dropping silent tears in the vexation of apparent defeat. But she cannot help it; she has delivered her soul, and seemingly in vain. Well, if he does entangle himself with this man, she has chosen the wifely Cassandra's part and risked anger to secure his weal. She kneels down and utters a supplication that they may be kept from the evil, and when she rises she is struck to see that little Beaty is looking in wonderment at her, the

large light blue eyes so roundly open that it seems as if the child's face is filling with two sapphire orbs. The motherly feeling chases away the grief, and she begins to interest her pet with pictures, and ends with a little romp.

A ringing cheer. What is it? Ah! those racing footsteps tell that all are hastening to the deck to catch a glimpse of the homeland. Mists are gathering on this spring evening over a low line of seeming cloud, and eyes as misty are looking out on the dim bar of apparent haze, while hearts beat fascinated with the grey vision that foots the far-off waters. They stand and talk long together, but it fades out in the coming twilight. Supper that night is not the merriest, but it is the most memorable. The company can never meet in such combination again; they are satisfied mostly that it shall be so, but they are not unmoved, and they eat with fuller hearts and talk with deeper soul than in the earlier voyage. Ladies gather up their nick-nacks and bear them to their cabins; gentlemen linger in twos and threes for a parting glass and smoke, for all know that if no mischance comes they will be in Liverpool

to-morrow night, or in the small hours following.

"Mr. Mumford," says a gentleman to his companion as they sit apart smoking sedately, "I envy you your happiness."

Mr. Mumford takes his great happiness very quietly, and only nods to it.

"So rich, so fortunate, so successful in everything, so supplied with every condition of enjoyment, I do think you the favoured of the gods."

Mr. Mumford says to himself, "What is the fellow driving at?" but, strange to tell, he half likes it. Perhaps because it is partly false, or, maybe, because it gives him the same importance as if it were true.

"What a different case is yours from mine! You return flushed with prosperity, and I undone; you to the open arms of your friends, I to be disowned by mine, cashiered from my regiment because I challenged an officer who had insulted a lady; you with a plain course open to you, I not knowing what to do."

"Make it up with your people."

"I fear they are utterly inexorable. Indeed, I do, Mr. Mumford, and worse still, I haven't the money even to reach them."



"That's bad management on your part, though." Mr. Mumford's manner is decidedly hard and keen. He might seem to be devoting himself to his weed, for his pulls are long, and the clouds are heavy, and he is silent several minutes. Mr. De Burgh is watching him sideways, while apparently sunk in pensive woe.

At last he slowly speaks.

"Look here, De Burgh, if that be your name——"

Mr. De Burgh assures him, by the bones of all his ancestors, that it really is. "He wouldn't, as a gentleman that had borne Her Majesty's commission——"

"Well, well, you know best," says Mr. Mumford, the high ring of his voice in play, as it generally was in moments of impatience; "but tell me now, if you care to tell a mere outsider, what you mean to do."

It fell icily on Mr. De Burgh's ears. What! all this honeyed attendance, that sugared compliment, the suave service with tongue, and hand, and eye to end thus. The bitter word, however, must be swallowed, or he will get nothing whatever out of the churlish fellow.

“What d’you mean to do?”

Mr. De Burgh cannot tell. He can take a secretaryship, tutorship, anything that is fit for a gentleman to do; has been good at private theatricals—

“Ah, that’s much more likely. The walking gentleman can be done there, you know, for a start, and I think at fifteen shillings a week, if you are fortunate; but the other two require a character, and I fear Her Majesty’s Government won’t give it.” A long hard stare. Mr. De Burgh’s eyes are unequal to the battle, and droop modestly till it is over. He sighs.

“It is hard,” he says, “that for simply sending a challenge, what every officer might have done, when a lady was——”

“Never mind that now. Think of the future. Your best chance would seem to be the stage—cards and billiards won’t carry you far, you know—and in ten years you might get to what they call ‘good business,’ and play old Dodderems, or Young Buck in the ‘Rake’s Progress,’ or any other leading character your master, the manager, might cast for you. I can imagine something better than all that.”

“No ! what is it?”

“Well, have you ever thought of anything in the agency line?”

“What did Mr. Mumford mean?”

“Why, you see, there are lots of things all right, but of a confidential character, which require a sharp fellow that has seen the world; private inquiry business, that pays splendidly when it's well done. And you look to me the very man to take it up.”

Mr. De Burgh expresses his desire to take the business up and embrace it at once.

“Bravo ! And, if you get on, you may rise to keep a private inquiry office of your own, and become a bigger swell than ever. Look here now, I've taken a bit of a fancy to you, and I've got a little matter, only finding a person's address, which I haven't time to do myself. I'll be five pounds down, and five more when it's found, to a man that can do it for me.”

Mr. De Burgh would be thankful to undertake it.

“Why, now I think of it, I had resolved to go to the detectives at Liverpool, skilled hands, you know, who'd run up the business in no time,

and I'd have no misgivings about their reliability, besides being cheaper."

Mr. De Burgh hastens to inform him he may thoroughly trust himself.

Mr. Mumford relents, and they discuss his little project for some time.

"You think you can do it?"

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Mumford. I'll work night and day to give you satisfaction. But what is your home address to write to?"

"Oh, never mind that. Address me under cover to Featherclough Brothers, solicitors, Charing Cross."

A shadow comes over Mr. De Burgh's face, as if a point is lost.

"Never mind," he mutters to himself, "if he won't trust me, I'll make that out as well as this."

## CHAPTER III.

## SCANDAL.

A DEEP winding valley worn of old by the Tyne; lengthening swells and billows of moor; grouse a-flutter as you tread elastic purple heathers; upland airs that move dreamily, yet stimulate, intoxicate with life the languid fugitive from burning causeway and steaming street: ah, Yeddon Common is not a place to be despised on this hot August day. Lie down on Nature's springy mattress of ling, ye that want holiday from city business and litigious thought. Lull and summer in the bliss of mere animal existence, O careless chield; thy veins full of slow, thrilling rapture, thy half-closing eyes drowsy with joy, as from the sloping bed thou gazest lazily over long rolls and hollows of waste, bathed in happy haze, to the

dim farthest, where the outer world is barred out with impalpable blue.

How lonely we are on this heathery slant !  
Yet misty centuries ago the conquerors of the world came out on days like this with their Julias and Octavias, and doubtless told their tales just here of incident and escape amid Parthian wilds and Libyan sands.

In moments like this, Roman matron grew patient here with her chilly, vaporous home of marshy lea and reedy wold. Over these hills flaunted the British girl in her southern finery with legionary and Teuton Cnecht. Hither came Hispanian cavalier with his Gothic bride to saunter in sunshine, while he pointed out to the lustrous, passion-filled eyes the lair of wild boar and wolf, or showed where he slew the great red deer or savage British bull. Here Tungrian brave loitered with his yellow-haired, fair-skinned damsel. Generals and mighty captains gazed from hence on the wild weird charms of their unchosen home ; for are we not close to a Torres Vedras of lang syne, to Hadrian's wall, and the great round fortress of Borcovicus that once laughed at the heart-

broken valour of poor red-haired savages, held sternly there at bay? Is not the still life of antiquity found beneath our feet, traces of atrium and balnearia, bits of tombstones with their diis manibus figured thereon, and broken members of old deæ matres? Ah! vanitas vanitatum. There, in the mountain moss and couch-grass, is the shadowy suggestion of a weed-mantled way to the old military gate. Up thither chariot rolled, bearing reclining beauty, clad richly in ornatus or chlamys, her diamond fibula a-flash with the imperishable stones that may be sheening even now on ivory wrist or bust of some English girl; ay, along that road she sped in the gay attire which had been aired in Forum or Colosseum, or glittered on the Esquiline in the Holland House of other days.

What a pathetic thrill it gives us as we put our finger into the ruts in that gateway stone, deep with ten thousand grindings of the chariot wheels, a-gallop on war or pleasure. How it flashes up the picture of an old, bygone life to pass into the ruined guard-house and scan the little chess-board the lazy soldier scratched with his weapon on its floorstone. How we feel

antiquity touching hands with us as we mark the brown stains of the iron bolts in the stone, eloquent of the barrings-out for myriads of nights until that one night came when the Pict burst through, with torch in hand, to hold his wild carnival here—to hold it in conflagration, and to pelt in boyish delight the statues of Cybele, Bacchus, and Victory from their pedestals, leaving them headless, armless, noseless, where they have been found after their sleep of fourteen hundred years.

But we may not linger here. Betwixt this crest—where old mind still justifies itself in its magnificent military choice of this fine defensive position—and that shadowy one opposite, is a hazy chink, a valley, in short, where these old soldiers marched, hunted, and lived. Let us descend thither amid the music of fluttering grouse and whirring partridge which we disturb.

A tower-top emerges, for we are nearing the old hamlet of Whisselton. That tower is strong, square, squat, as though made for refuge in time of war, as many of its fellows were. Soon the ridge-line of a long, low edifice reveals. It is



Whisselton church, grey with lichen, which the damp hills have engendered in those slow ages during which its bell has summoned worshipers to mass and vespers, matins and evensong, bringing the mourner to the open grave, sending the bridegroom rejoicing away. See how the thick, rich, oily mould has been lifting to the window-sills with the interments of centuries. Mark how those houses, bare, loveless, barrack-like things, have been encroaching on God's acre, hemming it in on three sides—a stony parable of greed on the one part, and generations of old rectors girding at the ugly trespass on the other, but too lazy or too good-natured to oust those cottage invaders, those humble annexionists and land leaguers of yore.

A queer old place is this church, stuffy, choky, and damp. One fancies the walls and fittings are all a-mould and giving off something, for the stilled air travels down the throat like a thin soup of fungus matter. A dim old place, where whitewash looks clayey, the quondam white paint livid or bilious, and ancient gildings a tarnished chrome, relieved with

plotches of ruined orange. The stone floor is black with moisture ; the oak seats are pitted or frayed with age ; the crimson baize has gone to a dim, brick-dust hue ; the cloth of pew or hanging is moth-eaten, and the regal dye of cushion and tassel in pulpit and desk is dull ; the velvet is mangy and pileless, and the *tout ensemble* seedy and forlorn. Slabs are seen on the walls, recounting the virtues of forgotten people. Here and there are beheld, in black smear on a dingy white ground, wooden panels bearing text, creed, and commandment. The organ is on the tower arch, its pewter pipes toning to a leaden tarnish, and the royal arms above it looking very rusty. Clearly the great wave of æsthetic church life has not lapped this shore. Yet there is no neglect, no dust, no dirt, no indications of parsimonious squalor or slatternly indifference. It is the church of one hundred years before, and some mind, in love rather than meanness, wills that while he reigns it shall not have its venerable homeliness, its strongly marked characters swept away.

But there are things here that astonish and interest. Over many a square pew, important

in its faded baize, and representing, doubtless, some considerable farmstead, hangs slung from rafter above a long tin case, the exact counterpart of an archer's quiver. It contains documents about tithe charge and so forth, and seems to remind parson and people of their financial relations, bringing "temporals" too much into the House of God. How strange those hanging tin tubes look! And dim, too, like everything else, with age.

One could fancy that some mediæval company of archers had repulsed a band of Moss Troopers, and then had come and left these quivers as a dedication to the Virgin, whose effigy in olden time was seen in that empty niche over the keystone of the chancel arch.

At your right as you enter the old church is the little stone ledge on which the holy water vessel stood ten generations ago. Here, in a recess, is a piscina; there is an aumbry behind the communion table; indications of a door and stairway appear behind the pulpit, and above the stone-benched porch is the chamber where dwelt the priest of yore, in scantier comfort, it would seem, than his present successor.

Let us pass through God's acre, by grey old headstones, with cherub head or skull and crossbones, to that antique house outside. It is a solid stone edifice, weathered and grey, strong and stern. Its mullioned windows and broad eaves interest us; its uneven roof, hollowing in places like a cow's back, with bearing the thick, heavy flag-slates, speaks most of age. It is the old rectory, and, like the church, seems sinking into the rich soil that so plainly rises up to door and sill.

Children's voices! They seem strange here, as if infantine laughter and quarrel were ringing around conventual walls. They are out of sight, the little rogues! Let us pass over that dainty white step, and beyond the black door whose brazen handle and knocker look so brilliantly clean, and get out of the hot sunshine.

An old-fashioned room, with books in store, and cosy chairs cushioned thoughtfully for backbones of all dimensions. The grey-haired gentleman has a look that belongs alike to church and cover. The healthy country visage refers to the moors, the white cravat to the church, and the shooting-coat and leggings to

the rods and guns at his right, in the corner of the study. He is talking, as we look on unseen, to a thin, severe-faced female, with a snowy apron over her black gown and a very clean collar, one who is the essence of a highly respectable domestic, clothed in a housekeeper's brief authority. She is above the middle size, but her spareness makes her appear not only tall but almost gaunt; and very lank and curveless she looks, habited in that tight, straight skirt and bodice. Her hands fold demurely in front, with an old-maidish grace, while she listens to her master.

If you scan her more closely you will observe that her hair is wiry, wanting in youthful gloss, but not yet iron-grey. Her thin face is somewhat triangular, sloping evenly on each side from caving temple and broad, sharp-squared brow to the pointed, resolute, well-developed chin. The spare cheeks have full muscular prominence betwixt cheekbone and nostril; muscles that work into ridge and hollow under strong emotion, giving great power of will and character to the facial expression. And the eyes?—they are not soon forgotten if they are

noticed at all. Large hazel orbs without brilliance, nay, with a set dimness upon them; with a fixed sadness dulling them out of all volatile sparkle and flash, seen in less stable souls; a lorn look, that will, under high excitements, transform into a glow-worm light steady and strong. The complexion shadows somewhat darkly, and in some moods becomes leaden. The every-day expression of the whole face is prim, staid, distant, downright; respectful, but refusing to accept gush or to give it; a steadfast face, leal to friend and stern to foe; uncompromising in its principle and probity; rigid, and tending, perhaps, to unforgiveness, with little of patience for the easy-going lapses which a fashionable may smilingly allow.

Need we say that she has been a power in the house from her unflinching conscientiousness? Need it be wondered at that the old rector values her, the worthless alms-hunter detests to see her come to the door, the curates are awed by her, the country side has voted her odd, or that bumptious people have elected her for a pet hatred, while judicious observers

Fossett seems in no way inclined to help her.

"Surely, Rebekah," he says, with quiet solemnity, "you are old enough to have learnt that you live in a censorious world; and surely you are good enough not to allow that wicked world and these idle tongues to hurry you into unjust and cruel feelings and acts towards these poor little things. When an old pupil asked leave to send these two motherless children here for health and protection, while he went seeking life elsewhere—I haven't told you anything about them yet, but you shall know all some day—I could not refuse him, inconvenient as it was to me. He will return, I hope, restored to health and strength, and reward you for the great care you have taken of them during the last three months, since we had to dismiss the worthless nurse that he sent with them, and who gave us both so much bother for three months before that. If any unkindness is felt towards you outside, depend upon it that woman has started it. But it will soon die away. Character conquers everything at last."

"Yes, sir; but when character is gone, yes,

gone, sir, what is to become of a poor woman?"

"What is to become——" but Rebekah had vanished. "Dear me, how moved that poor creature is! and she so little given to showing feminine weaknesses. I'm afraid they've been hitting her hard about these two sweet little trots; but what they can have said concerning them I can't imagine. That little, freckled, snub-nosed, unwholesome thing, whom poor Chapman, never a good judge about whom he should trust, sent in charge of them, has started a lie in revenge for being dismissed as a thief. That's it. Humph! I'll match a bad woman against Diabolus, and a good one against—against anything; Ruth and Mary in Paradise, if you like. It's a fine morning. I think I'll have a cast in the Upper Ghyll, and call upon an old friend for a little light on the way. I think a reddish fly will be the thing to-day," &c.

He was soon busy among flies, gut, and fishing appurtenances; soon seen issuing with his white hat bristling with circles of tackle and roughed with bobs of white, brown, and red feathers; net and rod in his hand, and basket at his back. It was beginning to be a



daring thing to do this, only Mr. Fossett, like Marshal Ney, did not concern himself with being daring. He left bravery to take care of itself. Still it was daring—nay, it was becoming defiant; for the world since he was ordained, some forty years before, had learnt to wag its pow in a very disapproving way at things which it once smiled to see, ay, and noted, as a mark, that its minister was a man of spirit, if not a spiritual man. But the new mode had come in and conquered most. One had given up this thing, and another conformed by giving up that. Not so Mr. Fossett. He liked field sports, and he would have what he liked until it was proved wrong, if all gowns, bands, and atrabilious faces should charge down upon him in massed column.

“Why, sir,” he would say, “this new light, with its religion of frames and feelings and appropriations and so forth, is only a thing of catch-words and finnickling phrases, shibboleths and party mottoes, not a whit better at the core than a set of election cries. Show me a man’s life, sir, his work, his fidelities, his charities, his silent renderings to Cæsar of the things that are

Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's, and I'll love him. I'll admire him, if we differ as wide as the poles; but spare me sickening cant, got up expressions, and the whole mass of sanctimonious ejaculations that are often the hypocrite's arsenal, the liar's resource. The prim crew, who can't be seen abroad unless they have black togs, black gloves, black walking-stick, black looks, rigid backbone, and circumspect, starchy step, as if they trod on eggs or a bubble world, may think *that* is Christianity, but I call it, sir, the masquerade which is negative proof that the whole is a cheat or a self-delusion," &c.

Thus the old man would talk, but he would never "reform." In early life he said he never went to extremes in one way, and in old age he would not go to extremes in the other; and, in sooth, he had seen and heard much which he never practised.

Duelling parsons of the type of the Reverend Sir Henry Bates, canon and baronet, and Father Dorriforth were possibilities when he was born, though a very small class. The Fleet Street gentry had been extinguished a little before,

but the flavour of them was remembered by old pastors living; the cock-fighting parson had died out in his own day; the hunting one was going after the dodo; but the one that loved angling and a little grouse or cover shooting should exist as long as he could handle rod or gun.

The old lady he consulted about Rebekah's "fit," as he called it, evidently knew much, but only smiled and said nothing. "Take no notice, rector," was the tenor of her advice.

"But that won't satisfy Rebekah."

"Well, perhaps not now, but she will soon see it in a right light."

"See what?"

The old lady only smiled and was silent.

"Dear me, these women are kittle cattle," he says to himself in his vexation, while he mounts to the Ghyll. "I shall say that Rebekah's cracked and Whisselton is becoming Bedlam, if I hear any more about this mysterious matter." But the merry breeze blows the vexation out of the healthy, manly mind, and the fine take perfects the cure. He is in his ordinary mood, genial and jakesome, when he descends

the hill with his heavy pannier at his back.

Two little folks meet him at the gate. A little toddles of some two years and a half, with an eye as blue as the lightest azure above, and curling, rippling locks as bright as any cloud the coming sunset will gild; and a boy, some couple of years older, whose eye is greyer and hair a much darker chestnut.

A great shout of delight from the infantine throats.

"Come, Florrie, give me a kiss."

The little lips are turned up poutingly with an arch appearance of indifference. Smack, smack, smack.

"Oo div doggy a tiss."

"No, no, my sweet little puss, I won't do that, although I love doggy very much."

"You're a naughty old man," cries the boy, striking him playfully and running away.

"Oo naughty man," cries little bright eyes, who echoes her brother very faithfully at all times.

The old rector professes to give the boy chase; rod, basket, tackle, fish rattle and shake, dogs scamper and bark as the old gentleman

runs after him over the lawn ; the boy screams with shrill laughter while he is being pursued ; the little girl looks very rueful, puts a finger in her eye, and seems preparing to cry, when the chase ends in a catch, loud, screaming laughter, and a kiss as brother drops struggling on the grass. The lad again strikes him playfully and demands a penny for goody, and the old gentleman gives it for another kiss. Rebekah is looking down from an upper window with a grim face, but slowly relaxes as dogs bark and the human trio give voice in different keys.

"Div baby a take," says the little fairy, creeping up to his side and looking up until she shows such a charming white little throat that he plucks her up and kisses it and the little cherry lips rapturously.

"Tum along, and we'll doh and det somesing nice."

Ready acquiescence, the whole party retiring to the study to deposit the fishing-tackle and explore a well-known tin canister kept for such occasions.

"There, Florrie."

"Div 'm some," looking at her brother.

For the next ten minutes the lawn becomes to the little folks an earthly Eden, where every sponge cake pleases and nothing else is vile.

Then Mr. Fossett has a mission to his cellar. Carefully he uncorks the bottle, decants the port, and puts it in a very cool place. Dinner, during which Rebekah seems to have an impetuous swing upon her when "siding;" anon a pilgrimage to the cellar for the ruby which is brought up very tenderly; a couple of glasses and his post-prandial nap. In twenty minutes he awakes, rubs his eyes, and rings.

The flush of sunset, in grand crimson and amber bars and globing clouds, is upon the heavens and the earth, and the calm is broken alone by the parting song of the birds.

"Rebekah, is it quite ready?"

It is.

The old gentleman rises, enters the garden, and gets a spade out of the tool-house. He wends his way to the orchard near the thick boundary hedge and begins to dig a little grave. When he gets out, Rebekah is seen crossing towards him with a long coffin-like something in her hands. He takes it from her,

lays it down very, very tenderly in the grave, and covers it in softly and gently.

When his task is done, and all is levelled as before, he leans upon his spade looking down, Rebekah standing dutifully by. At last, with a gentle sigh, he is turning away, when a rustle, a low laugh, and retreating steps are heard from the other side of the hedge; but they can see no one, owing to the deepening dusk, and the rich, thick mass of shrub and hedge.

“ Who is that ? ” Rebekah cannot tell.

## CHAPTER IV.

## TEA AND TATTLE.

KING FLUENCY reigns paramount to-night at the Manor Farm, and Queen Conscience—Ah, well! we'll pass her by as only cast for an inferior part, and turn to the manageress, or first tragedy queen of the holding, Mrs. Smart. This lady is a fine-looking woman, big, strong, and broad-shouldered, having a comely, proud face of a high tone, surmounted by a rich wavy fell of very warm brown hair, approaching, in fact, to a chestnut. Her pulse beats high, and well it may, for is not her best china on the board, and above the snowy table-cloth are there not seen all the rich resources of a good farm consummated in creams, butters, cakes, crumpets, "fat rascals," chickens, ham,



and tongue, with a fitting guest to discuss them all?

Yes, the table indicates Yorkshire catering strayed into Northumbria, for Mrs. Smart, as she says, is "Yorkshire all over." She has a Yorkshire force of will that is not seen in her male appendage, a Yorkshire canniness, and a Yorkshire tartness that makes even her facetiousness somewhat biting. She is not a lady to forget that she has a very fine silk velvet mantle for her voluminous person, a fine spruce gig, a good house, a commanding presence, a face that certifies she is on the right side of thirty.

Her guest may be about her own age, or a couple of years older, but a certain austerity of manner seems to widen the chasm of time betwixt them. A strongly made man of that five feet-eight-or-nine standard which includes such a mass of athletes and able men, there is nothing of the jovial in him. Severity is the prevailing characteristic of his face, relieved by a factitious sugary smile that would be unctuous if it were finished. That attainment, no doubt, lies in the future. His hair is blackish, stubby, and creeps on the ample brow in a

downward crescent. The eyes are somewhat cavernous, and darkle to some shade of nigrescent dun. His face is large, flabby, and rather hanging, the nose is regular, but, being somewhat too small, shadows a meanness upon the countenance. The upper lip is therefore very long, the mouth a thought pouchy, the chin neutral.

Perhaps the complexion is the most remarkable thing about the countenance. The whole face is shaven close, leaving two shadowy stripes along the whisker region, that appear to continue beyond even up to the roots of the nose; each pore seeming to hold a dark unsprouted hair, giving a pitted appearance of black puncture to the visage. Hence, the face is well qualified for hanging upon it a sanctimonious gloom or a look of forbidding piety. Indeed, the sugary smile seems only to give ebon gloss to that habitual expression of super-excellence, unco gudeness, consecration, assurance, and overt scrupulosity which make up the Reverend Jedidiah Knowles.

But this gentleman is as notable for his negations. He never laughs. Whether it be

that "laughter has in it the nature of sin," or that he has been sent into the world without any cachinnatory apparatus, the peasantry see in him a great contrast to old Rector Fossett, whose ruddy face and round hearty laugh "do'n good, he do." He does not appear to enjoy some good things. His eye only gives an askance, it never breaks out into manly, spontaneous dazzle when sweet maidenhood with rustling dress and gentle footfall draws near. A pained smile and facial muscles tensed severe offer in him the homage of the conventionalities to her. Another cardinal negation of his seems to be that he can discover around little that is good. The world is a lost world, its people righteously doomed; that is, all but a few, himself and some friends. These are saved, saved as by fire, yet still through a blessed dispensation, not permitted to be even scorched. Hence a weight of spiritual consequence creeps into his walk, yea, even into the articles he walks in.

Some twelve months before, Mr. Fossett had appointed this gentleman to the small incumbency of Yeddon-le-Moors, on the recommendation of a friend. This testifier had described

Mr. Knowles as a hard-working man of more than average ability; and, in certain senses, this was true. But, somehow, a simmering of unease had come with him to Yeddon and Whiseldon. Zeal, ridicule of old ways, agitation, frowning in puritanwise at innocent pleasures, had got into the quiet theological air. He had founded a Clergy Society, and come to the front. That rigid gait, that walk as if it touched an unholy earth, that laughless face, with its dark-haired sanctity, which seemed ever to be shaking a reproving head at a naughty world, that unaccustomed doctrine, combined with more than average theological attainment in certain veins, had silenced older, rustier men, and won upon the younger clerks.

Reproof, criticism, scrutiny, irreverence, disapproval seemed all to have sprung into being like mushrooms in a single night. The elder clergy, in a kind of mysterious shrinking, were beginning to merge their old manly, straight-backed, free demeanour into a round-shouldered, apologetic one, preparatory to the semblance of conversion and swimming with the stream.

There were, of course, exceptions, and Mr. Fossett was a pestilent one. His brain and breadth were awkward factors for the new lights to deal with, and his merry laugh and jovial smile were even greater stumbling-blocks. That quiet little quizzing of the new creed, and ridiculing by homely similes of the acrid moods and tense facial muscles of the "maw-wormish farce," as he called it, that sparkle in the keen eye which seemed to christen the movement an organised hum, was not to be borne silently. The iron entered into the soul of Knowles, and came out again as the steel of a two-edged sword in temper and on tongue.

He suspended altogether his rare visits to the House of Rimmon, as he designated Whisselton Rectory, and held aloof from "the man of sin," as he called its dear old rector, but this only among his clerical *confidantes*. Secretly the acids were working violently within, and openly he showed his high displeasure to his patron by a pompous austerity of double blackness when they met, and a saccharine complaisance at all times when he heard anything to his disadvantage.

They have sat long over the good fare, and weighty things have been said about free will, fixed fate, election, "the many called and the few chosen," &c., and altogether Mr. Knowles has been overwhelmingly powerful. Poor Smart, a simple-minded man, has been reduced to dumb-founded helplessness, save that he has been wondering why he need sell a sackful of corn to the sack, or give a quartful of milk to the measure, if a moral life reckons for something less than nothing, and an infusion of something which Mr. Knowles calls faith will do instead. Mrs. Smart has not been crushed entirely, for she has only attended weakly. A rising thought has been yearning for deliverance, a bubbling fountain of knowledge has been longing to surge out into a river course. Sly hits have been made at men whose self-sacrificing lives were notable, but still only "a savour of death unto death," as not possessing the one thing needful, which Knowles and a few others had. And generally it has been shown, beyond all contradiction, that no teaching, preaching, living, loving, doing, or leaving undone were of any use whatever, unless they had the

Geneva infusion, wherein the great speaker himself and his set had been steeped.

All this, as we have said, was awful to Smart. It was bewildering to those old-fashioned notions of poetic justice which arch over every poor mortal's natural ethical system. Still Mrs. Smart has survived it, and when the great genius pauses to take breath, groping in his spiritual wallet for things new and old, the daring woman cuts in.

Had he heard about the strange doings at the old church?

Now this was annoying. As autocrat of the tea-table he was dethroned from divinity to chatter. As, referred to "the old church," he was reminded of his new one, its ecclesiastical inferiority, and the bitter fact that the excellent of the earth do not always get its most excellent things. He paused. He would not reply. He would wait, looking on with a big marvel at the Amalekite woman who had no appetite for the choice manna of the chosen race.

"I mean about them childer at old Fossett's."

The great man's face showed less of Erebus; nay, it even relaxed.

"Oh! the children, Mrs. Smart!"—a little laugh. "Of course, I don't go to Whisselton Rectory *now*."

"I should think not, Mr. Knowles," exclaimed the lady, with scorn.

"Therefore I haven't seen them. I think they came some six months after I did. I hear, however, that they are handsome little things."

"Handsome, indeed! They're ower like their mother for that! though they're bonnier than her, as may easily happen."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Knowles, rousing up. "Some one told me that their mother was dead, but who that mother might be, the person could not say."

"Dead! It's all fudge. Never mind," and Mrs. Smart shook her head and winked oceans of knowledge.

"Eh! What?"

The great divine had fired up at last with all the eagerness of a gossip.

"Never mind."

The rubicund face looked still more sly and suggestive.



And you really satisfied yourself of the truth of all this?"

"I did. I seed her about it. I telled her what I suspected, an' she said it was trew, an' that was what she was turned away for. 'An' Rebekah knowed it wor trew.' Them's her very words, Mr. Knowles."

"Well, that is shocking."

"It is, Mr. Knowles. An' it shall be trew, that shall."

For some time there is deep, confidential talk, in *sotto voce*, as if the momentous solemnity of the matter made the natural tones a kind of profanation.

Poor Smart sits girding. He does not go with them, and it does not matter, for he is plainly nobody.

A knock. The lady disappears, returns, looks more important, more mysterious than ever. Two people, yes, two of their own servants, she at last says, have seen the old rector and Rebekah, the mother of them childer, burying something in a coffin—both swore it was a coffin—under a happle-tree at dusk.

Even Mr. Knowles's great logical acumen

admits that this looks ugly and suspicious.

Mrs. Smart beams like one who has convinced judge and jury. But her husband does not follow on the same side.

“Happen a favour-ite cat hes deed, an’ they wor burying it. Or t’ auld man wor trenching for sallery. He likes good yetting.”

“Theh high-dea!” exclaims his spouse, with a snort of contempt.

“Well, Mrs. Smart,” says Mr. Knowles, who does not want to be quite the cat’s-paw of a hot-headed, ignorant woman, “it may, as your husband says, be different, after all, from what we think. Some would consider it a case for the authorities, which I do not advocate—in fact, rather deprecate—at this stage. No, let us wait awhile; ‘watch and pray,’ as the good old Book says, and then,” &c., &c.

dug and has struck his spade upon something which he is now tugging at with his hands.

"Bide a wee, mon, bide a wee till I win doon to 't."

Together they disentomb a longish something encased in wood and covered carefully with sack-cloths. They bring it out on the lawn for the benefit of the light near to where Mr. Fossett coolly sits.

Villagers seem to be gathering about the gates. They unwind the sack-cloths, and an upper and under board are beheld. Next a thick wrapping of old, white napkins. They grow eager, breathless, for they are on the verge of discovery. They unwind the napkins and soon blood stains appear, which make the white cloths stick to each other. What next? Macgregor, in his excitement, snatches the object from his assistant's grasp, and, with a triumphant look at Mr. Fossett out of the corner of his eye, tears, with a sterner hand, while they stick the more, the cerements off one by one.

"Ah! I thoct we would fin' it oot," he cries, unwinding rapidly.

"The de'il's in it!" he exclaims, and dashes it angrily to the ground. The last napkin torn off has revealed a—leg of mutton.

Mr. Fossett looks on with quizzing, dancing eyes. There is confusion at the gate, and feminine garments rapidly withdrawing through the little crowd.

"Well, Macgregor, and how do you like your find?"

"Ou, ay, it's unco strange, but we munna be pit aff wi' this."

"Oh! dig all night. But just be kind enough to put that back."

Macgregor is looking ruefully at the mutton.

"Tell me, minister, wher'for' ye bury yer flesh?"

"To make it tender, man."

"Muckle gude that wad do me when my thochts were on t' wor——"

"And who," demands Mr. Fossett, interrupting, "sent you here, constable?"

"Nay, nay, minister, I munna tell that." Then, as if to himself, "The tappetless hizzie! A minister's housekeeper should be mair carefu',

mair preceese, an' shouldna mell o' sich things. She's dowff an' he's daist."

"So I thought," says Mr. Fossett to himself, catching a word or two which the cunning child of the north perhaps intended. "Get him candles, cook, that will last till morning."

"I'se dig na mair the nicht. Tak' it back, tak' it back," to his assistant, "an' be as gleg as a whittle wi' 't."

He turns to go away by the stables and kitchen, avoiding the little mob at the gate. Unfortunately Rebekah is there to meet him. She "wants to know how a person like him dares for to presume that a gentleman like Mr. Fossett could ever do anything wrong. Oughtn't a man like him, with a wife and five children, to be ashamed of himself? But why should she disgrace herself with speaking to the likes of him? Isn't a Scotch fool as big a fool as any other fool?" and she sweeps majestically into the kitchen without even having allowed the poor man a chance of uttering a word.

Poor Rebekah! This was not her usual style of castigating; she had a much sterner and quieter mode which Macgregor would have

liked still less, only she was just now stirred to the very depths of her being and frenzied a little off her balance.

The scandal which had been only simmering amongst the aristocracy of Whisselton was next day in full ebullition among the commonalty.

Hodge hinted to Hodge dark things, of which murder was only one. For a whole week the tempest raged, and three things happened which perpetuated the storm for another week at least. First, Mr. Fossett laughed; secondly, Mr. Knowles discharged his housekeeper as "a busybody in other men's matters," in spite of her touching plea that she thought she was only doing what he wished; and thirdly, Rebekah—stung to the quick at finding, for the first time in her life, that her name was smirched—retired from Whisselton Rectory, heedless of Mr. Fossett's importunities, to a distant home amongst her kith and kin.

But she only left one sorrow for another. She could not rest; she grew almost ill. Silent as she was, her cousin Peggy spelled out her secret.

"Mebby it's them twea conny, lile brats at

faffles ye, Mrs. Bostock?" asked Mrs. Metcalfe, lovingly, in the patois of the Yorkshire Dales.

"Wya, wya, lass," said her husband, when they were alone together, "wait a bit; she'll girn as weel as other fwoak te Yule. Let her be, let her be."

Yes, those two bonny little things during the last six months had worked down deeper into her heart of hearts than she had known. When in her impatience she had talked to Mr. Fossett a few weeks before about sending them away, she little knew how much they had become a part of herself. She knew it now, and the lost heritage of love made her fretful and impatient wherever she was.

Should she write and ask leave to return? Nothing but her indomitable resolution could have combated the knowledge that she was welcome to return whenever she chose. Oh! it was weary, morning, noon, and night, this painful void. Her cousins watched her standing moping, then setting wildly to work, then going with pen and paper to the window to write, scribbling a few lines, and tearing them

up at once ; and they silently shook their heads as they watched.

At last a letter came in bearing the Whisselton postmark. The new servant, Mr. Fossett said, could not manage the little folks. Nobody in the house could. Indeed he felt that they had changed towards himself. Would she come to them, or, if she was still of the same mind, would she take them to herself? Everything with respect to expenses could easily be arranged. This was joyful news to Rebekah, and she was another woman after the few tears had flown from her eyes heavy as the preliminary drops of the thunder shower. Frank and Peggy were soon on the way with a note—Rebekah had a power of compelling obedience—taking the tax-cart with them to bring the little folks back. She could not trust Frank with the children nor Peggy with the trap, and therefore sent them both ; sent them, for she felt she could never, never, never enter Whisselton again unless her master were ill and needed nursing. *Then* she would go, but not else for the whole world.

They came at the end of the third day all



safe and sound, these little ones in whom her heart was bound up, although she could tell no one who their parents were or what was to be their position and fortune when they grew older. Nor did it matter. She had a little money, and she would bring them up ; and, if their friends should claim them, she trusted and believed that they would allow her to be with them. Hence she had a full meal of content in the present.

Very happy, very frolicsome were her merry, ruddy young charge. Sylvan peace was around. Beautiful walks along lane and field wooed them into the life-giving air of Arkengarth, where a stranger was rarely seen. The primitive folk all knew each other, and passed their quaint, kindly greetings whenever they met.

The children's pleasures indoors were many, though simple, and their play continuous within or without. They learnt to love natural things, a matter of vital value to a happy life. The pet lamb, brought in for nursing, the weal of calf, or hatch of chickens, were all great concerns in their secluded existence ; while the day seemed marked with a white stone or a

red letter which brought them toys or gingerbread from Reeth fair or distant Richmond, grand with its castle, monastic cells, and abbey ruins. Yes, there were three happy hearts at Arkengarth Farm. So autumn passed, and winter spread its fleece from Lune Forest to Masham Chace, and spring, and summer, and winter came again, until a happy eighteen months had glided out of all their lives, marked by those pyramids in memory—Mr. Fossett's visits with goody for bonny little greedy mouths, and money for Rebekah and Mrs. Metcalfe.

## CHAPTER V.

## DETECTIONAL.

**M**R. JOHN SMITH—the gentleman we formerly knew on board the *Marco Polo* as Reginald Courcy de Burgh, Esq., late of her H. M.'s 50th Regiment of Dragoon Guards—like many others, had uphill work in commencing a new craft and a new career. He could not dig, to beg he was ashamed, and betwixt him and hunger lay that hateful resource—work: a resource as hard and as harsh as the man that had offered it.

The train was whisking him through a land of work. Town succeeded town, each more dusky than its fellow with the ensigns of toil. Thousands of great brick and mortar stalks pierced heaven in the eye, and every stalk terminated in a vent. From every vent rolled out

billows of blackness that sank on the stilled air, and drooped wearily over the stalk, like great, dark, mushroom tops. Mushroom grew into mushroom until there was one vast fungus of many stalks, a lurid canopy of many supports, an ebon banyan grove roofing its parent trunks. Within that funereal grove the toiling, struggling thousands of a manufacturing town had house and home. Only where a silver hiss of escaping steam shot high over the lowly dwelling did this "blackness of darkness for ever" seem to Mr. Smith's mind to be relieved at all. He felt very depressed. Every great flagstaff, with its drooping banner of smoke and grime, seemed to say to him, "in this battle now being fought we give no quarter to sluggard or drone." In sooth, he felt no proud quickening pulse at that swift stirring parable of energy. He hated it as an unclean thing. He detested shriek of whistle, rumble of wheels, and loud hum of whirling machinery; the booming thuds, the baritone complainings where boilers were a-make; the shriller noises of hammer in conflict with nail or wood, the crash of steel bar or iron sheet when cut or struck; the grinding of

laden luries, the curses of carters, and the harsh cries of men a-shout at their tasks were all abhorrent to this child of pleasure, driven, as he thought, into the very hell of toil.

It was late when he got to his goal.

An inky drizzle, brewed out of smut and mirk, dripped down upon Smiths, Browns, and De Burghs most impartially. A fog had infused into the becalmed air, and lay heavy on the streets, dwarfing lamplight to rushlight and giving it the jaundice. The causeways were sloppy, and the citizens passed shrugging their shoulders and dropping their heads betwixt them as they went, chilled to the marrow. It was not a night for lounging at street corners, and only where there was a subterranean bakery were the loafing class willing to tarry on the heated pavement.

It was indeed a lonely moment, a life-crisis, when Mr. John Smith stood there in that street, bag in hand, looking for his inn, and none the less so that he was subjected to unfeeling chaff from contiguous corner-men in a dialect he might divine, but could not understand.

In that lonely moment an inner voice seemed to suggest dark things. Was a life of industry

in such scenes worth living? Wasn't it better to cheat at cards, sharp at billiards, welch on a race-course, swindle at borrowing, fatten on defrauded innkeepers, or fill his purse by an occasional forgery rather than exist by working in such streets and towns as this?

He put the thought aside, would not listen to it, and turned into the Talbot, where he sweetly restored sinking nature with its generous fare.

Next morning saw a change. It was a sweet spring day even in this place, and he started in his new vocation with a new hope.

"Eliza Gaythorn, Clarence Street," that was it, but where? The local directory gave twenty-seven Clarence Streets in that huge city, and many Gaythorns, but never a Gaythorn in a Clarence Street. Search and inspection showed him some Clarence Streets where business life had overtaken home life and expelled it. Inquiry among many Gaythorns made it clear that each Gaythorn knew little or nothing about any other Gaythorn. Weary work it was, pacing street after street to get a clue to Eliza; depressing work it was to get a hint of the truth,

and when it was run to ground, to find it vanish; bewildering work it was to listen to the strange patois of the natives, and puzzle through it to the meaning; disgusting work it was to him, but not to hundreds of better men, clergymen, surgeons, city missionaries, to face those sights and sounds. But what tried him most were the manners, or the want of them. He would politely go to a door, and a man would come and show his back with a muttered he "knowed nowt abeawt th' wench;" or an old woman, as if she did not approve of him, would anticipate his question, saying, "they didna favver howkers;" or a girl would at once turn her back upon him and bawl upstairs,

"Sithee, Molly, yers a felley spurrin' efther someb'dy caw'd Lizer Gaythorn. Does ta ken owt gradely, lass, whar hoo lives?"

"Neaw. Mebby hoos de-ad."

Some were civil; most meant to be that, although they looked to him the reverse; a few could not be called away from that work in cellar or chamber, which he thought was done at such a fever heat, and nobody could help him. He began to dislike his task. He hated the in-

success ; he detested the shrill, harsh voices ; he disliked the hard, unsympathetic look so many wore, as if man were their natural enemy. His moral fibre was not of steel, and naturally gave way under such hard usage during ten days, and in a moment of depression he put an enemy in his mouth. But he rallied and went to his work again, yet day after day, like a mirage, Eliza still was unobtained.

All this time in Angel Street—a name scarcely reliable as a certificate of character for everybody in it—a lady was carrying on her business. The street had seen better days, had in fact been suburban, and a forgotten tradesman when he wished to gratify his forgotten wife and daughters, and stand out consequential as the successful Mr. X. in the eyes of forgotten neighbours, had built this house. It was a decent house of red brick, with an area kitchen long since let off as a cellar shop to a noisy, tinsmith worker. The front door was guarded by a large round pillar of freestone on each side, and these bore an architrave with triangular top. You entered the mansion by three broad crescent steps, which,



when scrubbed nicely with tawny sand, relieved by a little pipeclay scrollwork, looked imposingly clean. Yes, when a hundred years ago the proud parents and the blooming happy girls entertained their forgotten friends at the first housewarming, it must have been a nice place with the fields and trees in front, and the great garden behind sloping towards the river, and commanding the pleasant scene beyond. Fields and trees and gardens are all gone; suburban flower and emerald shrub have yielded to the dingy shop and squalid home of central city life; the fresh, blooming, wholesome looking maiden is seldom seen where dirty uncomely women, showing ungathered hair and an occasional black eye, with dinner in their hands—a red herring from the huckster's, and a frothing mug from the beer house—go clattering up and down in clog or clouted shoe. This house, and one or two others of its stranded fellows that have not perished in the march of improvement, alone with the old church represent the old days, and it still looks down upon the wretched cottages which stand on its former garden and pleasancess with an air of fallen greatness.

The window shows a glass globe filled with water, as if for gold fish, but creatures of another kind are in possession. A little board above it bears the inscription, "*Bleeding with Leeches.*"

In the room behind them, a spacious apartment, with a nicely-moulded ceiling and panelled walls, whose gold and white have long since toned into a rich tobacco smoke dye, sits a woman.

Somehow or other she also looks, like the house and the street, as if she had seen better days. A full-waisted individual, with deep chest and fine bust; that double chin, large face of good pattern, and full, keen brown eye, stamp her as one with a brain and a will that might queen it easily over the poor inebriates and scolds around. Sternness has marked her for his own; and that face, with its strong under jaw and its heavy, pondering brow, might easily be taken for a man's, were it not for the beardless cheek and the thick fell of dark, glossless hair. It is, in sooth, a face which has little of the quick expression and mobile play of woman's. You speak and she

listens, her eyes alone seeming to reciprocate ; you smile and she does not respond.

A quiet lifting of the brow into a deep wrinkle shows that she is interested : a setting of the teeth, as if to crunch something hard betwixt them, tells that she is getting dangerously resolute. Her habits are not as other people's. She is out at unusual hours ; is away on the sudden, sometimes for days ; has odd, queer people coming to her on stolen visits, who seem anxious to come and go unseen. Many times she has left home at midnight ; more than twice she has driven hither in "the wee sma' hours ayont the twal," and a "wee sma'" voice has been heard along the old passages up to attic realms ; often dingy women have come, and the little voice has protested again from garret to front door and cab outside on its final exit.

She is deep in thought to-day. "I ought to have twenty-five pounds, and I'll not do it for less." She might be speaking to the visitor that has just gone. "There's a good deal of trouble about these cases, and the law is hard to dodge. The risk deserves something as well

as the bother." She looks scarcely happy, scarcely miserable, halting on the grey borderland betwixt the two, where business and profit front danger and penalty. There is some disquiet, for she sits very still a long time, and the wrinkle remains unrelaxed on the brow, and the teeth set closer than before.

The door flies open and a child gets headlong into the room before she seems to know it. It stirs the woman's wrath to be rudely interrupted.

"Eliza Ann, how dare you enter in that way?"

The child—a girl of eleven years—stands confused with her own impetuosity. The rebuke has told also, but she is sustained with the importance of bearing weighty tidings.

"Mother, yers a mon——"

"You're a naughty girl; and where's your little sister?"

She names the place.

"Then go and bring her. I'll have none of my children going neighbouring."

"But, mother, he wanted Eliza Gaythorn, an' I said——"

Mrs. Scaife is at once interested.

"Yes, Eliza, and you said what?"

"I said my cousin at Chester wor cawd that ; an' he's coming, an' I run'd to tell you first."

"Quite right, Eliza. Go to your sister," she said, as a gentleman was heard knocking at the door. It was Mr. John Smith striking the door with his fist, and somewhat incapable of seeing the knocker. She looked out upon him with eyes which had in them interest, contempt, but little amusement. She saw at once that John Smith was not at his best. He had, in fact, got into very low spirits with sixteen days of failure, and, at the close of a hard day, had been pouring other spirits down upon them by way of getting them up. His manner was very superior, even now, to the average of Angel Street deportments, but he was in no condition for delicate negotiation. He licked his lips, smiled in a foolish way, and looked very unsteady and blinky about the eyes. On the other hand, Mrs. Scaife had heard something which made her thoroughly herself.

The unsteady hand keeps hammering on the door.

"Well, sir, and what do you want?" It is

said with a hard, unsympathetic, alien manner. He feels it; it disturbs much his somewhat precarious balance, and he stammers out something about a little girl, Eliza Gaythorn.

"There's no little girl called Eliza Gaythorn here."

He tells her with increasing intelligence that he does not mean that. It was Eliza Gaythorn who told him where to find a little girl.

She looks at him with a solicitude that masks her scorn.

"No, dash it, I mean the house where Eliza Gaythorn's little girl keeps her cousin Chester."

Mr. Smith blinks his eyes, grins, and looks triumphant, as if he has done a most difficult thing right at last.

"Come in, sir." He enters, more and more convinced that he has done it cleverly. She handles him deftly, and learns his quest.

"Eliza Gaythorn. Yes, I can help you to find her. But it's not my little girl's cousin at Chester. And who wants her?"

"Mr.—M—Mum——" He isn't at liberty to say; that is, he wants her himself.

"Nonsense, sir, you are trifling. Your em-

ployer wants her, and his name is Mumford."

Mr. Smith is staggered, for he is sobering fast. Perhaps the fusil oil, imbibed in the two glasses of bad whisky bought at the "Packer's Arms" near, and which has so disturbed a head capable of battling successfully with four when the "dew" is pure, is working off. Perhaps the anti-mesmerising power of the woman or the circumstances are restoring him to himself. Anyway, he is more of De Burgh than a little while ago.

"Tell me where John Dacre Mumford may be found."

That woman's great, convex eyes seem to shoot towards him as she speaks. He shrinks with the thought that she could rifle his soul of its secrets.

"Where is he now?" He is saved; he doesn't know, and cannot tell.

"Don't know? Psha! You've got to tell him when you know where this Eliza Gaythorn is—and you haven't found her yet, by the way—and you must have his address."

"No, he has only a London address, and he cannot give it."

“Very well, then, come to me again when you can.”

She brings him to terms, and gets the address.

“Now you must go, for I’m engaged. Write to him and say a lady, who showed you a ring with the motto ‘truth in absence’ inside it, will tell him when he calls here where Eliza Gaythorn may be found.”



## CHAPTER VI.

## INTERVIEWING.

WHILE Reginald Courcy de Burgh, Esq., that is John Smith, was busy in his quest, Mr. Mumford went on one of his own. He travelled to Whisselton to have a word with that "old frump of a parson," whom he expected to meet and mould in the rectory house. He was not fortunate in finding the old gentleman in. The servant told him that he had gone out with his rod, and would not be back for two hours, at least. Mr. Mumford was not a gentleman to care much about things æsthetic or antiquarian, when things commercial or causes legal came into question, otherwise the scenery, the old church, the Roman wall, and the very farm-houses within easy reach, into which bits of ancient Roman carvings had been sacrilegiously

built, would all have furnished him with delightful objects of attention. His mind was on weightier matters. "Let us leave these things," he would have said, "to dilettante fools and canting idlers." Yet what was he to do during those two precious hours? There wasn't time to go and order dinner, wait till it was cooked, and then eat at leisure, washing all down with bad country wine. Besides, he wanted neither dinner nor lunch, and, if he went, the old gentleman might turn up, and then drift in another direction, giving him another two hours of waiting, perhaps. No, he would go into the churchyard, which was a snuggish-looking place on one side, and loiter in the sweet spring sunlight. He got tired of sauntering from one odd-looking gravestone to another, and at last sat down on a tomb, swinging one foot carelessly backwards and forwards, as, with his hat drawn down to shade off the sun, he pondered on his plans and his errand hither.

"I must succeed. All life is utter foolishness without success. There's only a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and that step is down

into failure. All ability counts for nothing, all effort, if the verdict upon it is insuccess. People may say that duty is the first consideration, and results only the second; but nobody thinks so. I'm sure your so-called good people don't. A bishop who took his third class, and got canonry, deanery, and mitre by trimming and truckling, turns up his unctuous nose in smug privacy at the great First, who ended as rector of some mouldy-looking old church like this. He sneers in his sleeve at the prince-scholar once so high above him, now so far below, who has made nothing out of it all, and who didn't know, simple man, the little tricks which more than equalise all such advantages. And why so? Because the standard of life is success. Sawbones may be A 1 at an operation, and Bolus and Pilula mix the best messes that ever kept a fellow out of this place, but, if they haven't got the requisite hum to make it felt, they'll trudge it on foot to their patients, while Quack and Smirk, who were ploughed twice each, look down upon them with a grin from their carriage and pair. Ay, and so will other people with them. And

why? Because they are palpable failures.

"Soldiers, lawyers, ay, and even philosophers and scientists, follow suit. Haven't I known these last lie and steal to secure an idea, and get it out in their own name before a brother savan could? And what does it all mean, even in these transmundane creatures? Why, that success is a finer thing without worth than failure with it. As for your merchant—everybody's *that* in some sense or other—why, gilded Traffic looks down with a pitying smile at leaden Trudge, who's never known how to finesse betwixt crime and capture, or to whitewash, liquidate, and so forth, into easy-got wealth. And what's the reason that he reaps so much of honour and of everything that's good? He's successful. And I'll be that, too. I *have* been that in a way, all except that great mistake in the beginning—" Here an ague qualm seemed to shoot through him; he got up quickly, and began walking up and down the churchyard paths.

Suddenly he saw an old man sitting on a gravestone with his leg thrown across his crutch, as if in a gout-rest, and looking at him with a wistful, inquiring glance. He felt as if

the old man had been playing the spy upon his mind, and he spoke carelessly to him, as if to throw him off the scent. Talk was potential knowledge, and knowledge power, with Mr. Mumford, and he was soon in a quiet confab with the maimed old labourer.

“And so your rector is an old man?”

“No; he’s only youngish—not seventy yet.”

“That’s a good age, though. I suppose he’s had children?”

“Ay; a mather of two, a lad an’ a lass.”

“Oh! indeed. A boy and a girl,” says Mr. Mumford, growing interested.

“Ay, both dee-ad.”

“You don’t say so! How sad!” exclaims Mr. Mumford, with increasing interest. “Tell me something about them.”

The old peasant explains that one died in India, a soulger, a nossifer like; and the young lady died about the time she might have been married.

Mr. Mumford is much affected, and pities the poor old bereaved father.

“How lonely he must have been ever since! Has he had no grandchildren here to stay with him?”

The old man gives a thin, dry, senile laugh.

"Theer wor two childer; but iverybody wants to knaw what's gotten 'em. It's my opinion theer's summat wrang, like them babies i' t' wood, an' t' resurrection men hes 'em now, I'll be bund. They wor theer a Sundeay, an' a Mondey they wor out o' seet, an' three week afore that Mrs. Bostock went away. It's varra queer," suggests the old peasant, inquisitively.

"It looks so, anyway, my friend."

"Ay, ay; I dunnot like to say owt agin Mr. Fossett, he's been varra good to me an' Ailie; but I doubt they're his and Mrs. Bostock's."

"No. You are wrong there, my friend. I know very well who was their father, and their mother has been some time dead."

"Nay, now, is that trew? I'm fain t' hear 't's trew. Air ye sure, sir, it's trew?"

Mr. Mumford vouches for the truth of it.

"I'm glad on 't, I'm sure. I'll gan an' tell Ailie now. It's time t' folk knew that."

Mr. Mumford looks after him with a quizzical look, and a little internal sense of satisfaction, as the old man's crutch clatters on stone

and flag in his hurried flight. He moves towards the house, convinced that the fishing-rod which he sees quivering on the sky-line above the privet-hedge of the garden has an old gentleman attached to the bottom of it, and that that gentleman's name is Fossett.

Twenty minutes afterwards, the old rector is handing him back a letter he has inspected with more preciseness and business steeliness than had been expected.

"It is indeed the handwriting of my old pupil, James Chapman."

"Yes; and you will observe that I am co-guardian with you, sir."

"I do," replies the old man, with a matter of fact voice and a very matter of fact look.

"And, therefore, as you are an old man without family, it would, perhaps, be more appropriate that I should take the children and bring them up with mine."

"You are aware, Mr. Mumford, that these children were solemnly committed to me by my late pupil before he left England. Have you any document to show that he wished them to be out of my hands?"

No, he had not, but he had thought that Mr. Fossett would scarcely care to have the bother of them.

"That is a different matter. Duty is one thing, inclination another, and a very secondary concern."

"Oh, indeed! That is to say, I quite agree with you."

"You do, do you?"

"Certainly. But as James and I were boys together at school——"

"Ah! but we were friends in riper years at college, Mr. Mumford—at Oxford and afterwards."

"Well, so you were; but I should have thought that when he expressed a wish that I should bring up the children——"

"Not to me, sir."

"Well, but he did; it can be proved."

"That letter only begs Mr. Mumford to work harmoniously with me as co-guardian."

"Yes; but he said more in his dying hours. And, as a proof of the trust which he put in me, he made me his contingent residuary legatee."

"Ah! then he gave you an interest in the



children's deaths. Foolish, foolish act. But can you show me any proof of this confidence—any document?"

He had not brought the deed. But did Mr. Fossett doubt his honour?

"By heavens! if anyone dares to say that I'd do anything wrong——"

"Nobody says anything of the sort. Only the very argument that you advance for having them is the very one which should keep them out of your hands and make you very delicate about ever suggesting such a course to anyone, much less to me."

Mr. Mumford considered himself scarcely treated as a gentleman by such an allusion.

"Listen, sir," and a tone which his dogs when naughty knew well came into Mr. Fossett's voice, while his manner was studiously polite. "Listen. I'm a much older man than you, and have learnt to look at matters on more sides than one. You have brought me a letter which I admit is genuine; you say you have besides a deed giving you certain rights. That also may be as genuine. I admit that this letter mentions one John Dacre Mumford;

but I don't know him, and you bring no evidence to prove that you are really that person."

Mr. Mumford started.

"You may be; I do not say that you are or that you are not. It is possible to buy these documents and take the name; it is possible to steal them and do the same. Mumford may be dead, or a sot who would sell his rights for a trifle, or a madman that could be robbed of them. And the person getting these under one or other of these conditions may feel sufficiently secure as a claimant that his identity will not be disproved by the right heir. In short, there is no end to the forms of chance or fraud which may have brought these documents into the wrong person's hands, enabling him to reap the advantages they offer. I do not say I have any proof," he continued, as Mr. Mumford's face began to register "stormy," "but I am not bound to furnish any. It is for you, not me, to prove that you are the John Dacre Mumford whom poor James knew. When you have done that, then, sir, assume the tone with which you began."

Mr. Mumford did not like the "old frump of a

parson," and felt the inconvenience of having to prove to such a sceptical mind what he thought was sufficiently self-evident. But he would do that and more, he said to himself, and beat the old fellow at last.

Dauntless resolution was one of his secret mental prides, and he determined that he would conquer, but he could not help feeling that he had met with a foeman worthy of his steel. Invoking a shade of impassibility on his countenance to cover his mortified pride, he said he could understand Mr. Fossett's great caution in behalf of these children, but he begged to assure him that he could give him every satisfaction that he was the gentleman he represented himself to be.

There was his wife.

"No evidence."

"Well, there were the servants, confound it——"

"Be calm, Mr. Mumford; this is business, you know—legal business, and, therefore, exact business, nothing else."

"Well, to cut the matter short, there were several persons, all of whom could be easily pro-

duced. If Mr. Fossett required this evidence it was only right that he should have it. It was also well that they should work pleasantly together, because if the children remained at the rectory, the question of allowances would have to be considered and settled."

"Of course." How drily the old man said this! "But you must permit me to say that the Court of Chancery has power therein, and you can have little interest in bringing that paramount influence into the business by refusing what is reasonable. Though, for the matter of that, if poor Jim had died insolvent, the children should still have had gentle breeding, as I am neither poor nor powerless."

"No doubt, no doubt. And now that I am going, I should like just to see these dear little ones. Doubtless they are in the house."

"No ; they are away in the country, but you are welcome to go to see how they are lodged and provided. Here is their address," he continued, scribbling two or three words on a card.

Mr. Mumford waved the card away as it was offered. He could quite trust Mr. Fossett's fatherly supervision of the young folks. He

made great show of refusing it, but at length the card went into his pocket.

“Can I offer you a little lunch?”

“No, thank you.”

Mr. Mumford felt as if that would have choked him outright.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DIPLOMATIC AND OTHERWISE.

IT was on the evening of the following day that a gentleman might have been seen in Angel Street. He knocked at a door, and Eliza Ann opened it, and showed him into the faded old wainscotted room. A lady was there, square of figure, large and round of face, who received him with less than a welcome. It seemed like the meeting of Æneas and Dido in the shades.

“She on the ground averted kept  
 Hard eyes that neither smiled nor wept ;  
 Nor bated more of her stern mood  
 Than if a monument she stood.”

The only difference was that the apparition loomed not half clad in mist, except so far as the evening fog had fought with the candle and

conquered it, and that the well grown shade was not doomed to speechlessness for want of that fleshly garniture which makes voice possible. With all expression wiped out of her face, she motioned to a chair, and then sat down.

The gentleman scarcely appeared altogether at his ease for the first moment, and sat looking at her as if recovering his breath. Still she sat, wearing the same expressionless look, giving no help to any advances he might be wishful to make.

“Eliza, I have come——”

“You mean Mrs. Scaife, sir.”

“Well, Mrs. Scaife be it, then. I’ve come to ask your assistance in a particular matter.”

“And you would never have left me, sir, if my assistance had been wanted.”

“But I didn’t behave badly. I gave you five hundred pounds when I married you to Scaife, and it was almost every farthing that I possessed.”

“You left me, John Dacre Mumford, because you had to choose betwixt prospective wealth, from your old aunt, and me—me, whom you found an innocent, good girl in her house as

her maid, and innocent as I have never been since." There were tears starting now in those stony eyes, but they soon siped back to their well-spring. "And nicely," she exclaimed, with feeling of another sort, "did the old hag serve you out at last!"

The suggestion seemed to have a terrible sting in it, for the strong man writhed for an instant, incapable of concealing the pain which went crawling like worms of fire through the marrow of every bone.

He paused to calm himself, then with pale face and low voice said,

"We need not talk of that now, Eli——"

"Mrs. Scaife, sir?"

"Mrs. Scaife I mean. Nor were you the better off because she broke her solemn promise to me."

"She met perfidy with perfidy. Had you never promised me what you did, the ruin which came would have passed me by."

There was a flash on the face which told of coming tempest.

"Nay, do not say so, Eli——"

"Ah, let me hear that again, and——"



"Well, well, you know that I always treated you kindly."

"Yes," she retorted, with a kindling sneer, "as the vulture the dove."

"No, now, that is unjust. I never said one unkind word or denied you one clearly expressed wish."

"Except the one wish of all, to make me an honest woman. *That* wish was expressed as clearly as your promises were, sir."

Mumford fidgeted in his chair; this was not like succeeding at all.

"Ah, Mrs. Scaife—Eliza comes most natural to me——"

"We will have no Elizas, I tell you. One Eliza more and out of this house you go. Is the man growing weak?"

"Not weak, only very regretful. If you only knew, Mrs. Scaife, what my punishment has been, you wouldn't upbraid me thus. The world darkened when I blindly gave you up, and no one took your place that could charm or guide me as you could."

There was untruth to a solemn vow at an altar rail in this, some untruth and some truth

to fact, but she softened in manner, though not in tongue as yet, choosing the sugared side of things, as we are all apt to do.

“And richly you deserved that and worse.”

“And I have got it, Eliza, and all else I deserved.”

Strange there was no ordering him out of the house now. She was simply silent, gazing with eyes out of which the stoneiness had somehow dropped.

“Yes, long lonely years, hard life in a distant rough colony make a purgatory that ought to burn away many sins by their keen, torturing fires. I have suffered and thought, Eliza, and thinking have only suffered the more, when I remembered the two years that made life a fairy land.”

“Then why did you not make all your life that, Dacre? as you might have done? You confessed your happiness often enough, and you deceived me, if you did not deceive yourself.”

“I deceived myself. Nay, I confess, not even that. I allowed family pride, family importunity, the hopes of succeeding to the little

family estate, all to sway me, and the result you have taunted me with."

"Yes, and I'll ever taunt you with it. It was base, Dacre, base beyond all expression. I gave you a beautiful girl's whole heart,—for beautiful you know I was—and, if you didn't know you had my very soul in your keeping, you were duller than John Dacre Mumford ever showed himself where there was any possession to acquire, or gain to get; and what did you give me, I should like to know? The honeyed droppings of poisoned lips, lies, and desertion to crown them all at the bidding of another. And think what I am now become merely to live."

The hard, hot eyes dimmed with scalding, angry tears as she uttered this last thought. She would have gone barefoot through the world with this man, begging her bread and enduring all stress and hap, so that he had never withdrawn from her a man's truth and a man's trust. And she had been struck where the blow was sure to be most felt.

"And I also have suffered, Eliza. I say now that I did wrong. I say I ought to have braved my aunt's wrath. I say she would have

respected the man who defied her and was true to his own character, more than the one who was false to it by yielding. I know that *now*. I say that, during these last twenty years since we met, I have had no pleasure in thinking of my conduct. I had none in the three years before my aunt's death, during which she treated me as her acknowledged heir. I had none after, as you have reminded me. You have had a larger revenge than most women get, especially when I tell you that I gave you nearly every penny that I had. What would you have more now, Eliza?"

The woman seemed not unmoved by his pleading; old memories, buried but not dead, were rising above ground. Still she would speak no word of forgiveness, nor would her woman's pride give any sign of renewed interest in him or his.

"You might, Eliza, let twenty years cover the vexations which they have buried."

No, they have never been buried, still—still above ground, walking ghosts asking for revenge. No, her wrongs were not forgotten things, and never could be.

"It cannot be helped now, but there can be compensation in some way or other."

"What compensation could ever be made by anyone? And what would ever be offered by one like yourself?"

Compensation! the word seemed to irritate her as concussion vexes dynamite, and the fulminates in general.

He tried to persuade her that he would endeavour to find a way to compensate the past. She listened in silence, and he thought that he was loosening the roots of her antipathies. But he was scarcely right. She was rather stranded by the fierce self-suppression and the wrath that had found no relief in adequate words; or, fatigued with holding in unreinable passions, was growing angry with herself, and still angrier that she had not been more fiercely angry all through.

"I don't want the will, Eliza, and I may have more and more the power of being useful to you."

His past conduct was a very poor pledge of it, she said. The woman was beginning to loathe herself because she had not launched a stormier passion at his head, but he saw it not.

"Well," he said, a surly look of being baulked flitting across his wrinkling eyebrows, "I was hard pressed; mother, sisters, brother, aunt, all importuning and threatening."

"A true man never for such childish reasons deserts the woman he pretends to love."

"Pretends!"

"Yes, lying, perjured wretch, pretends! It was all pretence; viler pretence than ever hell or evil offered to gain its cursed end. Weeks, months, years of pretence, till a little filthy advantage was offered, and then away went the mask. You've had remorse, have you, scoundrel? You've had your tortured hours, the snakes of hell and heart-rack hissing in your sordid mind, eh? May they never leave you! May they be with you on your dying bed, spitting out in poison the name of the place to which you will go! May blight, ruin, and destruction crown every self-seeking plot your accursed life is spent in weaving, and may a coward traitor's death be its only epitaph!"

She had risen as the convulsing torrent came from her bottomest hate, her eyeballs glaring, her arm menacing, her whole being telling that

she was swept away in her fury by the hoarded angers of twenty years.

He had risen, too, astounded, almost stupefied with this outburst of passion. He had calculated on much of it having died away in her heart as it had in his own memory, never dreaming that there are natures to whom time only intensifies wrong and wrath until both are avenged.

"Mrs. Scaife, you are mad. Whatever has come over you?"

"Come over me, wretch? Why, the wrongs of my girlhood, the mockeries of my womanhood, the insults of my wifehood with that cruel clown to whom you married me, the crimes of my widowhood, to which I've had to stoop to keep three children from starving. All have come over me. Your very presence has brought them, for if I had never known you they would never have known me."

"Then I'll go."

"You shall not, sir," and, with her back to the door, she confronted him, looking a deathless hate and defiance.

He seemed, bold and acute as he naturally

was, to be too dazed to gather up the signs that a subtle thought was entering her brain, now that it was cleared of the thunder-cloud of its wrath. Still he saw that he had made no open progress towards that success which always condoned with him so much. He saw this as clearly as he failed to see that purpose, with its protean adaptations, was taking shape in her mind.

"You came for something. Sit down and tell it."

He hesitated. No, he would not.

"You used to boast that nothing ever drove you from your point," she said, with a sneer, "and a few angry words can do it from an injured woman. Be true to that vaunt, if you are false to every other!"

No, the angry woman must take her angry words for her reward. He would go, for she was neither reasonable nor just.

"You would have a wronged woman suffer silently. That's *your* reasonable, John Dacre Mumford; and your 'just' is to endure, without a word, organized false——"

"Now, by Jove! you are madder than ever!"



I never organized anything. Others might, but I held on, at the worst only half wavering, till just such a mad passion as this, mixed with jealousy, accusation, and false charges, drove me into the arms of those who hated you. That outrageous fury twenty years ago on that night when you looked beauty itself filled with a score of fiends, *that* settled me, when months of railing against you passed by like an idle wind. *Then* I listened to my mother's appeals and my aunt's bribes, but not until you helped them both, Eli—I mean Mrs. Scaife."

A flickering thought fell on her face, a baffled, refuted look it was, before which the storm weakened. She hid her face in her hand for a moment, as if conscious that there was too much to be seen therein. He had never told her all this before, but she felt its truth. Her face was very pale when she withdrew her hand, and an angry tear was seen in each eye as she struggled to compose herself. She motioned him to sit down. He stood sturdily silent.

"You know my nature. Be seated and tell me what you want."

"I want no more of this madness," he answered, bitterly; "and I would not have come a hundred miles to talk to one so self-governless, if I had thought that twenty years could have taught you so little."

"And you would have expected nothing better if you had known the life to which you condemned me, Dacre. Sit down, do. It may be that we have something to forgive each other."

In spite of all her opprobrious language, he admired that fiery nature, which sent something of the old beauty over the haughty, defiant face, and he was half disposed to accept the half-offered advance. But he would not show it, and remained standing with sullen brow.

"What do you want?"

"To bid you good evening."

"No; you want me to do something for you."

"I did do, but you have shown me clearly that I should put myself into the hands of an enemy."

"No. The fury of many bitter thoughts during long, soured years of trial is gone now. You may tell me what you want."

"I did want to see you, and I've heard you too. I wanted you to do something which would have been an income for you, involving small trouble, but I see I can't trust either your prudence or your fidelity."

"You may trust both."

"Not to-night."

He essayed to go out, but she kept her hand on the door. He looked very stern, and she began to feel that she had driven him beyond the range of her power. There was only one way now of leading him which she knew. She grew gentle and half apologetic, but he looked at her with a hard manner, only a glimmer once or twice in his eye told of a passing softness frozen on the instant within. She grew almost coaxing, but he would not yield.

"If I am to say what I came to say, I must know to whom I am saying it."

Such were his words as he went out. She followed him only to learn where his hotel might be. His bearing was not repellent, rather that of one hurt than angry. He could not permit her, he said, for the sake of old times, to thread the streets bonnetless after him. He must always

treat her as a lady wherever he met her, and he therefore begged her to go home. If she wanted his address it was at her service, but, after what had occurred, he must beg her not to use it.

She seemed more touched with this than might have been expected.

"Would he not return with her?"

"No."

"Might she call at his hotel in the morning?"

He preferred not. If she wished to see him again, for the sake of days which he could never forget, he would call in the morning.

"Please come. Do, Dacre, do."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A BARGAIN.

**T**HE storm was not renewed next day. Mrs. Scaife was calm, almost humble, certainly deferential in her demeanour. Mr. Mumford was not upbraiding. He wanted her, he said, to take charge of some children whose father he had known, and who had died out of England; a faithful friend, who had always served him well.

"One of your managers, Mr. Mumford?"

No, not quite that. The children were delicate children, and, he feared, might not live. The lady looked very long and scrutinisingly at him as he said this, but he went on unheeding.

"They would most likely have to get their own livings, poor little things, and must be brought up accordingly; but that was a matter

for future consideration. There would, of course, be board and lodging and some little education, also her own trouble, to be paid for. What did she think would recompense her?"

Mrs. Scaife looked serious, as if calculating closely up all the petty details of expenditure; but in reality she was saying to herself, "What is it he wants me to do? I know he'll pay well for it, if it is done to his mind." At length she named a figure.

Well, yes, it was quite reasonable; indeed he had rather expected that she would have asked more.

Ah! well, she knew that she could trust to him to make up anything that she had not taken into account.

"To be sure; to be sure."

"When will they come?" Such a little impatient coaxing manner, as if she must have them at once.

He could not say. Perhaps in a month, or it might be in a very few days. Anyway, he would bring them himself, and he was now going to see about them, and if, she would prepare to receive them at any moment, he should feel

obliged. He hoped, after he had placed them under her care, to be able to send a portmanteau or two of second-hand linen and garments, which might be made up again as clothing for them, &c.

The lady said it was all right, and the gentleman seemed glad that nothing this time had gone wrong, and both effervesced into smiles of gratification over the mutual transaction. They were at the door shaking hands when the gentleman seemed to be struck with an idea.

"By the way, Eliza, it occurs to me that we might arrange this matter more to your satisfaction and convenience in another way."

He stood pondering, as if lost in thought.

"Come in, Mr. Mumford, if there is anything more you wish to name."

He scarcely seemed to hear her, he was so deep in meditation.

"Come in."

He followed her in mechanically, and so sat down, lost in the world of a new and brilliant idea.

"It has just struck me—but, hang it, I'll say nothing about it now. It isn't my way to

broach new ideas until I've turned em' round and looked at every side. I'll think it over, and tell you, Eliza, another time."

The lady grew pressing.

"Do tell me, Dacre; I may be able to help you; and you know, clever as you are," she continued, with one of her little fascinating, coaxing, pleading looks, "I've done that before to-day."

"Well, it has just struck me, but I haven't had time enough to think it out, dash it. I think I'd better let it stand over for the present."

"No, do tell me. Do, Dacre." What a sweet, little, childish plaint the big able woman could put into manner and voice!

"Well," he said, apparently no longer able to resist such appeals, "it strikes me, but—but I scarcely can see it all round as yet. You know you'll want your money every fortnight or so?"

She was afraid that she would, as the children must prevent her attending as closely to her business as she had done.

"That's it. You must be paid very regularly and punctually, and, on the other hand, as a business man, I may be often out of England



for a long time together; in India, Canada, at the Cape, or where not? and there may be delays in sending remittances. Posts miscarry, steamers founder, agents embezzle, and so forth. And it has struck me that it might be better, perhaps, to pay you a year in advance at a time, or a lump sum down once for all. I prefer the former plan."

Strange to relate, the lady preferred the latter, if it were commensurable with the necessities of the case, and pressed it.

"And you think so? Well, I haven't considered it fully, as I said. It does strike me that it has this merit, that a business man never knows how soon he'll be ruined; and if he pays down on the nail while he's got it, as I have now, he's done with it once for all. But, as I said, I must consider the matter."

It looked as if Mrs. Scaife stood to win, and she grew eager and pressing.

"Now the idea, Dacre, of your hesitating! —you who are the very pink of promptness. Can't you make up your mind now, and name what you propose to give?"

"I propose to give nothing now, Eliza, be-

cause I can't see a good basis to work upon. The boy is about five, and at fifteen in this district would be earning his own living in one of your mills. The girl is about three or four, and might be earning her living earlier or later as a mill-girl. And I can't see whether ten or twelve years' purchase is the proper sum to put down with their coming here."

She thought twelve years would be a very fair and reasonable basis to go upon; but if he was not satisfied, why, say the word, and she would accept ten, although it would be closer dealing than his transactions with her had ever been.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Eliza. I always liked to be liberal with you. I'll think it over, and, if the plan approves itself to my judgment, twelve years be it. You think it over, too, in the meantime, and then there will be two heads working on the subject, and we may get right at last about it. I must claim the right of withdrawal if the scheme won't work. On the other hand, it would be awkward if I got up into the heart of the Transvaal or the Andes, and the money sent got lost, or stuck to

somebody's fingers, and you were compelled to send the poor little things to the workhouse. I shouldn't like that, anyhow, and we must stave off that possibility for both of you, whatever plan we adopt. A nice lump sum, which I am able to pay down now, if it were well invested, would bring in enough to be going on with, and would always be at hand."

It was curious what a fascination the lump sum had for this woman.

"Tell me, Dacre, how much it would come to, for I'm poor at calculations; and, now that you have whetted a woman's curiosity, she cannot wait. She wouldn't be a woman, you know, if she could." Again the little fascinating, coaxing manner.

"No, no; let it stand over," &c., &c.

And so the pair played with each other like little children. Would that infantine innocence had been theirs likewise!

"By the way, Eliza," he said, as he shook hands at the door, "you will still carry on as much of your business here as you can, and I think that this locality is as good for the two youngsters as any other."

"Oh! certainly, if you wish it, Dacre."

There was less of heartiness in this than in some other parts of their conversation.

"Ah!" he said internally, as he quickly delivered himself from Angel Street, "the man that is worth his salt will succeed. I've got that woman body and soul again into my service, and she'll do the needful work. Only let a woman's spite exhale off her hot tongue, and you may make a deal out of her afterwards."

"What is it that he wants out of me?" reflected the lady. "A lump sum down; no further bother; the children to take my name, or some other than their own; and to live in this nasty street I heartily hate? I've got it."

She ruminated long on what she had got, but did not say what it was, as she sat with eyes almost looking ossified in their fixed gaze into vacancy.

Mr. Mumford's morning engagements were not yet at an end. His destination was Corn Street, which was as suggestive of golden harvests as the other one of cherubim and seraphim. It was a narrow, dark, damp, little street, shut in at one end by a great, noisy "works," where

fiery iron was beaten by ponderous steam-hammers into shape, and where great bars of metal seemed to be eternally a-clatter as they were thrown from waggon to floor, or swung from floor to waggon. Its redeeming feature for the residence of a gentleman of studious mind was that there were not so many children, whose faces were sticky with goody and dirt, to fall over as in Angel Street.

Mr. John Smith was sojourning in Corn Street at this time.

"I think I've booked her, and she doesn't see it. Now for this fellow, who hasn't half her brains, and whom I must work at will like a set of marionettes,"

Thus soliloquising internally, Mr. Mumford knocked at the black, blistered old door. Mr. Smith was within.

"You got my note from the 'Spread Eagle'?"

"Yes, and he hoped Mr. Mumford was satisfied with his conduct. He could assure him that he had had great difficulty, and days and nights had been given to the task of finding her. He was quite footsore with the everlasting street-trotting and tramping, kenfound it."

"Finding her? Why, Smith, she found you!"  
Mr. Smith looked terribly taken aback.

"Oh! no. I found her in her own house."

"Nonsense, man. A child found you half-screwed in the streets, and took you to her home, and her mother, Mrs. Scaife, turned you inside out and stole your secret. Tut, tut! A precious style of training this for a private detective and fashionable inquiry-office near to a swell square in London, when a little, ignorant girl out of a back street can lead you to a woman who can detect you! Faugh! Managed the business well, indeed!"

Mr. Smith looked small, and the noggin of whisky which he had swallowed as Mr. Mumford knocked at the door ceased to burn, outdone by a greater internal fire.

"And the time you've been about this business! Why, it ought to have been done in three days, and I've already been waiting from home twenty, to the serious concern of my family."

Mr. Smith was very sorry, but he could not help it. "If I had known——"

"Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk. I did think that I'd wash my hands of you, but, if

you'll promise to keep off that muddling drink, I don't mind giving you another chance and paying you just as if you really had found this woman who found you."

Mr. Smith put on a little dignified air. He said he could not admit that she found him. He would go and see her and——

"Mind you do nothing of the sort. She's more than a match for two of you." (Mr. Smith groaned internally at the naked truth of this.)

"Besides, she'll warm your ears for making false statements about her. Your letter, I think, stated that her business consists in removing squalling children from rich to other and more silent quarters, eh?"

Mr. Smith looked nervous. He could not deny it, and did not like to admit it.

"I said I understood so, sir."

"Pretty much the same thing. Well, Smith, she swears it's a lie, and, if ever she gets the sight of you again, she'll not only comb your face with her ten commandments, but she'll set all the bullies of the neighbourhood at you."

Mr. Smith waxed uncomfortable.

"I'll be bound," said Mr. Mumford, medita-

tively, as if talking to himself, "that you could get a murder done hereabouts for a sovereign and a skull cracked for ten shillings. No, no, De Burgh, that is, Smith, keep off her vicinity. You've tried to rob her, she says, of discovery and character, and she'll nobble you if you come near, or 'law you' for defamation, if you write any more about her. Keep away, neither calling, writing, nor concerning yourself in any manner about her affairs, otherwise you're done for."

Mr. Smith had no inclination to know any more of such a person than he was compelled, and looked quite a superior person as he said this.

"Right, Smith, right; there's sense in that. She's an awful temper, and, if I were your enemy instead of your friend, I'd send you down to her just now, and I'd bet, if she only lifted her finger, that those corner boys, cracksmen, and nobblers generally would give you a ticket in no time for a coffin, or a month in the infirmary at the very least. And, if she only lifted her tongue instead of her finger, you wouldn't forget even that minor punishment as



long as you lived. I've found her out, I can tell you."

Mr. Smith said, rather huffily, that he had given his word he would not go near her, and that was enough betwixt gentlemen. Somehow Mr. Mumford felt that this was a hint that he was going too far, and that Mr. Smith was not a dog.

"Scarcely, Smith, scarcely. Don't annoy her with letters, tale-telling, hints to the police, or tips of any kind to any other of your brother detectives. I mean let her henceforth be dead to you, for I can assure you that, if anybody does her any injury of any kind, she'll debit you with it; and, if one of those friends of hers in the neighbourhood can discover where you are to be found, he'll travel far to find you."

Mr. Smith thought it was very hard that he should henceforth be responsible for every injury that everybody might do to an evil-tempered, vindictive woman who was *de facto* or potentially a criminal.

"So I think, Smith, so I think; but you must take people according to their natures. Yet if you think that I have any other interest in this

matter than protecting you, pay her a visit when you have done with me this morning. Only you'll put me to the pain—it will be pain, because I want to give you a start in life, which your rich, distinguished relatives won't, you know—to the pain of finding a fresh agent, for I'm sure you'll not be equal to doing anything for anybody for some weeks to come."

Mr. Smith looked as if he wished the interview, Mr. Mumford, and Mrs. Scaife in particular, consigned to the things that were.

"I have passed my word," he answered, impatiently. "Isn't that enough?"

"It is if you stick to it. Only, Smith, if you're wise, get out of this without delay. You've bungled this business sadly, but I've got another chance for you. Only while you are about it, stick to the cup that cheers and not inebriates, as Shakespeare says, or Milton, I forget which."

Mr. Smith hid away a very sickly little laugh, the last faint wintry gleam of which caught Mr. Mumford's eye and put an edge on his voice, shrill as a band of bagpipes in full skirl.

"Don't sniggle, De Burgh, *vel* Smith, or

what the doose you're called when fairly reckoned up. I had some work for you, but, now I look at you, I believe you've been tippling already this morning."

The little man cowered before the big one, and swore by the whole college of Olympians that he was as sober as a judge, or even as Mr. Mumford himself.

"Come, come, Smith; I've not tasted this morning, never do, in fact, and anybody with a nose can tell you have."

Mr. Mumford stared sternly at Mr. Smith, who fidgeted and looked too uneasy to be up to high detective mark.

"Are you equal, Smith, to listening to me?"

Mr. Smith was.

"Well, then, there's a woman who'll be liberated to-morrow morning at nine o'clock from Newcastle jail. She's been doing her six months for a theft, I hear. Her name is Ann Gresley. Meet her at the prison doors and arrange with her to travel across country to this address"—giving him a card—"in order to help you quietly to regain two children from a woman called Bostock who

has stolen them. I'm interested in getting these youngsters, a boy of five and a girl of three or so, restored to their friends, and this woman Gresley knows them, having been once servant in a house where they lived. Besides, she'll work on the job *con amore*, because she has a spite against Bostock. You must be very spry about it. Endeavour to find the exact house where they are living; have a trap at hand, and try to get clear off, unseen by anybody, if possible. There'll be no end of bother and delay if we go to law. We're sure to win, if we do, but a woman that takes a fancy to children like this one, sticks to them like an octopus. So you see, Smith, this little plan, if well carried out, will save us months and years of litigation. Whereas, once in our hands, we can easily prove our right, and, being in possession, she'll not dare to impeach it. Her crime in stealing them forbids that. When you've got clear away, use the children tenderly—mind that—attending to all their little wants. Give the woman the slip, and make by Askrigg and Middleham for York to this address, where you'll find me."

## CHAPTER IX.

## PURSUIT.

THE sweet breath of morn at Arkengarth is mingling incense of hyacinth and polyanthus from the little garden with that of milking kine, and lark and laverock are making heaven melodious with their matin hymns. A sweet, dreamy hush seems on over-laden Nature, so that Nanny, when she brings in her pails, frothing white with their nectar, appears to set them down in gentler wise than is her wont. The clink of chain and gear is heard outside as the husbandmen harness their horses for the field, and the soft bleat of lambs in the distance blending with the purling brook alone give voice to the pastoral peace of morning. One might be looking on the childhood of the world, so still is the scene in the hazy bliss of this matin light; so few the moving

evidences of man and his works ; so absent the clank of machine, or reek of spouting chimney or belching furnace ; so utterly unknown the hurry of commerce, and the headlong rush of fretful men racing, fevered, to their graves. The tranquil spell seems to be upon these homely farm folks, who are so unaccustomed to the city's fidgety existence. They move with a more subdued mein, and Nanny, as she calls to Jack, weans out of her voice the loud laughing tones which are wont to be there when she gives him, with coquettish malice, some order to harness horse or tend the little milch herd in byre or field.

The children are at their breakfast near the window, through which and the outside eglantine begin to struggle the morning rays of a dreamy sun. What a gloss there is on little Florrie's amber hair ! How the rippling tresses and curls shine as she tosses them about while dipping spoon into smoking bread and milk, and conveying the prey up to cherry lip and little pearly gateway. There is a solemn earnestness about her as she looks seriously down into the basin, selects carefully the next bit of

sop, lifts it to her little mouth, and gives them a sweet, grave look from those sapphire orbs while she sucks and swallows the juicy morsel, then digs with relish into the steaming pottage again. The boy, with ruddier face and darker complexion, seems quite as happy as his little sister, and throws merry glances at the attendants from the grey-blue eyes, fringed with long, girlish black lashes, which make you ask what is it that is so unusual and witching about those liquid globes.

Rebekah is standing over them, a happier looking woman from tending these young people than when we saw her in Whisselton Rectory. She preserves her grave, authoritative manner, but you can see that every mouthful the bright, healthy-looking children swallow goes as nourishment to her own being. The farmer's wife sits gazing at them with loving glances of gratified pleasure, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes beaming with a smile as they wander from Florrie's creamy face to the boy's brown cheek and roguish eyes. Her husband smokes his after-breakfast pipe, and seems, with a mute pleasure and wonder, to

## PURSUIT.

follow his wife's glances towards the children's table, and, while the blue wreaths curl lazily over his head, the cat rolls at his feet on its back, its legs a-stretch and claws revealed, playing with his wife's worsted ball on the clean, sanded floor, and throwing upward purified looks, as if protesting gently that it also is an object of interest when impartial justice is done.

The landscape outside, golden with sunny haze, the near hills, with their ashen mist-caps still a-wear, the solitary valley, with its holdings few and far between, the fleecy sheep lying on the slopes or browsing lazily at ease, the ploughman whistling on his way to yesterday's broken toil, the happy group within the old farm house, warm at heart with pleasant anticipation in their own simple way—all might make a peace-pursuer say, "This is the anchorage for my unquiet bark; here will I moor it, and set up the staff of my rest."

Anon these good folks begin to talk.

"I think, Mrs. Bostock, t'lile lass's raash is gone."

"Yes. But it wasn't a rash, only a spot or two."



"Nanny. Nanny's a decent lass, mawm (*demure*) an' fendy," (*painstaking, thoughtful*), and she herself will spare her from the churning to look after them.

"Nanny, put that piggen (*pail*) down, an' tak' t' barns alang t' inbank (*sloping way*). Gie 'em hawf a haver keh'k (*oat-cake*). I can trust Nanny weel."

Nanny seems proud of her promotion, for it is by no means an every-day thing to have the charge of "Mees Florrie." Rebekah looks reassured as she mounts the cart, and gives a last look at the little group filling up the doorway, kissing hands, while Jack gives a buckish flourish with his whip, and bears her away.

When Nanny had been absent with her charge an hour and a half, Mrs. Metcalfe began to come out every few moments and look expectant down the inbank for their re-appearance. At last she got impatient, and confided her opinions to her lesser half, who had come in.

"If that mazing, Frank, doesn't come directly, there'll be a bonny durdam when she does."

Frank thought it curious that she had not

come back; but, being a patient man, and a wordless withal, said very little.

Another half hour had passed, heated and fretted with continual runnings to the garden gate, and occasional shouts of "Nanny!" Then she threw down her dairy implements, and set off, agitated at first with anger, and soon with alarm, to find the party. Nowhere could she see them. They had evidently strayed far beyond the limits which she had prescribed. Down the slope she ran whither the lower meadows and the highway met, but she failed to see them. Her anger was a-move with being put to all this trouble, but apprehension soon took its place when she failed to find them in that one little hollow which she could not overlook, and where she fondly hoped they would be at play. Apprehension froze into cold dismay when she beheld Nanny being led homeward by a neighbour, and the children not in sight. A wailing cry, prolonged and shrill, broke from her lips, but her eagerness carried her quickly onwards to where the couple were.

"Thou ill-heppened trapes, (*ill-favoured trollops*), wheer's them childer."

But the sight of Nanny's face as she got nearer silenced all censure. The poor girl was being led like one who had received a death stab, and was fainting away.

"What's all this?"

"Connily, connily, Misthress Metcalfe. I fund her running an' shouting an' skirling i' th' road like somebody clean daft," said the woman.

"Nanny, Nanny, wheer's them childer?" and the frantic woman shook her in her urgency to restore her to her senses.

The girl's head and white face wagged from side to side in a wan, forlorn, weary way, but she could not speak. There seemed to be blood on her pallid lips, the ruddy cheeks had become livid; the eye lost the last glimmer of speculation, the head fell back, and she sank down in a swoon on the grass. The woman ran quickly to the little rill near, and filling her two hands again and again with water, dashed it in her face.

Poor Mrs. Metcalfe was perfectly helpless.

"Whativer shall we do? What mun we say to Bekah?" she kept moaning, as she hung over the unconscious girl. "Nanny, Nanny! t'childer! Wheer's them barns?"

No response.

"What's te done wi' em, lass? Nanny, Nanny."

"Bide a bit, Misthress Metcalfe. She's coming to."

The eyes opened and stared wildly about.

"Nanny, Nanny, lowp up, lass, and show us t' childer."

"Hawd a bit, Mrs. Metcalfe, ye'll drive her clean maddled," said the woman, deprecatingly.

But Nanny was gaining sense while her mistress was losing it. Intelligence began to be seen even in her wandering words. She looked at them at last, mumbled something, and pointed up the road. They could not make it out.

"Mum—mum—mum," and still eye and finger were in the same direction.

"Chil-der—gig," she at last stammered.

The women looked at each other confused.

"Man an' woman."

"Ah! I've gotten 't," exclaimed the woman.

"Twea on 'em hev gipsied 'em. I saw that man an' woman. They're up that way."

"Run, run," gasped Nanny.

Mrs. Metcalfe set off like a deer-hound, but

suddenly on her right the sound of wheels was heard. It was Jack and Mrs. Bostock in the spring cart.

“Bekah! Bekah! they’re stown, they’re stown.”

“Whatever’s the matter?” cried Mrs. Bostock, in alarm.

“T’childer’s stown. Beeath kidnapped fra’ Nanny.”

Rebekah pressed her hand to her heart as she heard this, but the mental power came at once into office. Getting down with Jack’s assistance, she made her way stumblingly to the girl who was now seated leaning back on the kindly neighbour’s arm. The girl could now tell them how that when they got out of the fields into the road a gentleman appeared, who talked to the children, and asked her some questions; presently they came to where a lady was, and she saw a gig a little ahead, the horse eating the grass by the wayside. The children seemed to know the lady, and played with her as she sauntered up to the gig. Meanwhile he had kept her in play with her back to the children, asking the names of hills and farmhouses which he pointed out in the opposite direction. When

she turned round, she saw the lady and the children in the gig, and the horse beginning to move off. She instantly felt she had done wrong, and ran towards them. The man seized her. They struggled a moment, and then she was thrown down the bank into the little beck ; when she got out and into the road again, he was just taking over the reins and starting off some thirty yards ahead. She ran screaming after them, but the man whipped the horse, a fleet one, furiously, and she could not catch them ; after that she remembered no more.

“ They’ve been hanging about here for days,” said the woman.

Mrs. Bostock had a man’s decision.

“ Now, Jack, if you’re a man, drive for your life.”

Jack was a man, and drove as if his salvation depended upon it. Whip and voice, hiss and whistle, anything and everything to lift the steed over the ground.

“ Hamsam,” as Jack called it, pell mell, in reckless desperation, the nag was driven. Occasionally on some distant rise of the road Jack said he got a “ gliff” of them, but they

never gained on the thieves. Poor Lanty's sides smoked and lathed with the toil, but all in vain! One cruel uncertainty was that no one was met for long who could tell them if they had seen the fugitives. At last a labourer told them that they were "hawf an hour ayed." Another uncertainty was whether their horse would keep on the trail much longer. Jack had driven him sharply into town to show off his points, and sharply out to indulge Mrs. Bostock's impatience to get home again, and, betwixt the two, most of his brilliancy and staying power had gone. More and more slowing did poor Lanty become, and the smoking coat, the creaming yeast churning up under collar, strap, and back saddle, the groggy gait, blowing nostril, and starting eyes distressed, showed that Lanty would soon cease to totter forward at all.

"A mile more, Jack, and we can get Farmer Puke's horse, and he's a good 'un."

Jack encouraged his steed with voice and whip, but all in vain; the poor dumb creature, having done his all, came to a dead standstill, and then dropped.

"Run, Jack, and borrow their horse and gig, and send somebody here."

Jack was fitter for the plough stilts than competitive foot racing, but he clattered along with right good will.

The horse and gig had gone out.

"He might tak a pleugh hoss if he liked," said Mrs. Puke.

"Fetch him, an' I'll be efter 'em i' sex needles."\*

They brought out Piper, a fat kind of equine hogshead set on four thick legs, and to his saddleless back Jack at once climbed. But Piper's pace was not according to Jack's haste. The great heavy feet clanked over the stony road, and Jack sawed at his mouth, and kicked with his spurless heels, but it seemed as if they almost stood still. Jack lifted from his back at each great clumsy bound, until betwixt him and Piper you might have taken a fine sight of the landscape, but the scoring in miles was small. All the sawings, kicks, and "gee hups," and even profaner encouragements were

\* A common phrase in the Dales, signifying an interval during which a woman knitting would work the loops off six needles.



of no avail. There was puffy haste, great labour, great noise, tremendous clattering, and no little shower of sparks from Piper's iron hoofs, but small progress. Still Jack did not lose heart. He got distant views of the culprits. At last on a distant rise of the road, clear against the sky line, he saw them from the top of a long descent.

It aroused his whole soul, and, with a tremendous digging into his flanks, he got Piper into a thundering gallop adown the slant. His great plunges lifted Jack nearly on to his neck at every bound as the beast pumped and gruffed and huffed with his efforts.

“Thenk goodness, he's gannin' at last. Ony let me get t' t' new inn, twea miles moer, an' then——”

A tremendous flop. Piper has dug knee and nose into the ground, and Jack has spun over his head into a bath of mud, rushes, and green slime at the side in the slack of the road. Splashings and dashings in extrication. Gurgles, grunts, and gutturals, as Jack cleans his mouth of the mess; “By gums” of astonishment, as he clears the slime from his eyes, and pulls the

sedges out of his hair, gazing at them with rueful looks.

“Wh—wh—wh—whoy, Piper. When I can see thee weel eneugh, winnit I gie thee’t, goby.”

Piper struggles on to his broken knees, and looks very shaky.

“Theer, govison, (*blockhead*) tak that,” and Jack flings maliciously at him the wisp of rushes wherewith he has rubbed down his own bemuddled person. He sits down to get his breath and collect his thoughts in this supreme moment of defeat, watching the faltering horse with great disgust, and then melts with a touch of pity. Poor Piper hobbles aimlessly, and then makes for a runnel of water, and drinks. Poor Jack! deserving to win, yet baffled thus. It is hard. Himself here, Rebekah behind, and the children, where?

## CHAPTER X.

## STING THOUGHTS.

**I**T is Sunday morning in York. The grand chimes of the minster are making the upper airs palpitate with the burden of their joy, and from each of the twenty-four old churches of the city comes the summons to prayer and praise. There is Sabbath calm in the very tremulousness of the peal-tormented atmosphere, there is peace in the shuffling of those little male and female regiments of quaintly attired charity children as they wend to church ; there is a peace in the clatter of heavy boot and spur, and sabre rattling in its metal scabbard, as these dragoons pass on to sermon or mass ; peace in the quickened pace of laggards when the chimes die out, and the warning bell declares that clergy are leaving their vestries to begin

sentence and exhortation. There is even peace in that hurrying tread of belated maid or youth, in that important father and reddening mother hastening on their brood, in that prim, creaking, old maid, lank and severe, in this one of fifty dressed for twenty-five, as they struggle to pew and seat ere the first sentences of worship shall sound. And when impatient footfall and imperious bell have ceased, and flag and street know neither figure nor footpat, the silence of lonely ruins reigning around, there is appalling peace, cloister peace that upbraids to the ear of that tall man who walks up the great steps of the ancient minster, and dare not go in. Why should the grand frontage of the old cathedral, frosted with the stilled voices of six hundred years, rebuke him? Why should the distant sounds of rising hymn against reiterating chant hereabouts fall like reprimand on the quailing ear?

So Sabbath-like seem the old walls, consecrated, overhung with embalmed prayer and undersong of ancient saint and pious worth, such mystic breathings appear to come out from lofty arch and cunning tracery, quaint

chiselled stone and awe commanding tower, that other days seem to have tongues for souls that need their voice. And there across the causeway, nestling like St. Margaret's under Westminster Abbey, deep is answering to deep as Luther's hymn from worshippers, in little St. Michael-le-belfry, replies to the grand impressive choruses of the great cathedral.

This man seems like an army caught in a defile betwixt the two; like Lot's wife struck on the plain with her eye and heart on the Sodom she loves. So still here alone outside while hundreds are making the air vibrant with their uplifted praise, so lonely while there is such voiceful communion of saints with each other and God, why does he not go in and pass an hour in a way which he has not done for a score of years? It would kill questioning time, it would titilate the fancy, work up the attention from unwelcome things on which it is too prone to feed, and altogether give a new sensation or overlay an old one. Who can tell? There may come into the mind breathings of that calm which, doubtless, some of these worshippers feel, that exalted tranquillity to which even

poor erring humanity can attain, borne on the wings of celestial hope over the tossing waves of this troublesome world. He will go in, but which shall he choose. Ah! the humbler sanctuary will be the better for him; quieter, more soothing; and so he crosses towards St. Michael-le-belfry. A single voice in earnest intonation. He pushes the door aside, and sees a rapt attention in most faces, none observing him save a beadle, who is even himself sitting and joining in the service, and, not wishing to disturb or be disturbed, gives a silent glance towards a vacant seat by way of pointing out accommodation, then listens on.

“Oh, man, what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

The head is withdrawn. No, he cannot go in there and sit with satisfaction. There is no telling what that reader may read, what that preacher may preach. There is no knowing what may come from hymn or psalm, with their many sided references to an every-sided experience of man's as saint or sinner. No, they may be the doomsters of his intent, and that will

never do, for he must succeed. If he could only be sure that he would not get annoyed, he would like to go in. There might be eloquence lifting a man out of himself; play of passion that stirs the care-fettered soul; imagination that soars aloft with one who is becalmed with dulness or dazed into utter, aching void; anecdote, analysis, even some little commiseration by way of acknowledging the weakness which taints the best and that would be as salve to the mind. But there is the risk of threat, denunciation, utter hopeless condemnation. No, the experiment is too risky for a man not overmuch at peace with himself, and he had better go; and soon his feet are echoing on the stone as if he were treading alone some Tadmor of the wilderness which men had shunned.

He re-entered the deserted coffee-room of the "York Tavern;" fidgeted with nail cutting, window gazing, carpet walking, but only to feel self-vexation the more palpably. He would try a strong remedy, for even he felt that the sabbath aroma, or a rebukeful unsympathetic something had got into the very tavern itself. He would read the highly sensational novel, of

the scrofulous Gallic pattern, which he had bought for a weary or self-tormenting hour like this. With a sense of sin, with a feeling that his mother's shade was rebuking him from her grave, but wilful still as ever, he adjusted the cushions and laid back on the sofa to read. He urged himself the first few pages, nay, he compelled himself to wade through the brainless tissue of dreary wickedness, not pleased, and certainly not in the attainment of pre-occupation. But out of the vapid inane story of sensuality, an incident, a plot, a narrative rose like a cresting serpent above a pitchy marsh, giving fire, venom, horror to the monotonous slough. He read with purpose now, eagerly on, seeking the end. Did it run out smoothly at last, no hitch, no misadventure, the end gained, the estate retained in the clutcher's hands, and no Nemesis at the goal? Ten pages more and then he should know the result, ay, and the author's opinion implied in the sequel; for somehow he cared about the unknown driveller's verdict on the plot of the faithless trustee.

"When will you dine, sir?"

Confound the fellow for interrupting.  
"Usual time, of course."



The race of incident, escape, danger, denouement gets exciting. Only two pages more and he will know the upshot, and that opinion which he now values more than ever.

The same interrupting voice.

Doose take the fellow. Engaged. Can't be bothered. Nuisance. Why does the homma-haun stand chattering at the door?

"What *is* it, man, that you can't let one alone?"

"There is a person at the door, sir," the waiter blandly replies,—they are accustomed to county families at the York Tavern,—“who says he *must* see you at once. A Mr. Smith with two children, sir.”

The gentleman gains his feet with a great bound as if he has got a heavy electric shock, and quite alarms the waiter, who is “not used to that sort of thing.”

“I will see him at once. Let me see, you can let me have a private room?”

“Yes'r.”

Two little things of very tender years, bearing a very tossed, crumpled, bunched up appearance in their dress, tired, too, with their long morning ride, are led into the private

room. They have great hunches of bread and butter in their hands, a man's device for their sustenance, rather than a woman's, as it ought to have been, and they look up into the tall man's face with a child's instincts hungering for love. He notices them with an interest which they feel is not for them, and the little faces don't fear, as they read his hard, keen eye, and the younger begins to whimper, and at last to wail aloud. The little boy hugs her to his breast regardless of those present, whispering to her something which soothes.

The man's eye has a flutter in it for a moment, and then he relieves himself with putting on a cold, stern manner, as he addresses their conductor.

"You are two days late, Mr. Smith, and here have I been waiting with the furies stinging me to be off to attend to important business elsewhere, that has been neglected at great loss on account of this trifling affair."

Mr. Smith apologises. They had so much trouble.

"Never mind that now. How did you get rid of that woman?"

"I gave her the money I bargained for, sent her to get some finery for herself, and then bolted, riding here."

"Do you think she will be able to trace you soon?"

"No. I made several changes of conveyance and route in order to perplex anyone following us, and I think even 'a 'cute un' will be thrown off the scent."

"And you are sure that we have finally done with her? No hint of any place or person you have seen in this inquiry."

No. Mr. Smith had maintained the secrecy of the grave all through, and the discretion which was hereafter to distinguish his celebrated private inquiry office had been exhibited in this particular quest. He would stake his reputation that she never crossed their path again, always barring accidents, of course.

The children had given over eating. The faces of these two men spake something to them which none but the childish heart could hear, and they both began to cry with a cruel look of desolation on their fair young countenances.

Mr. Smith's hand had looked as if it was

preparing to cuff the boy's head. The lad seemed to know it, and shrank from him.

"Let him alone, Smith. We'll ring and have 'em put to bed for a few hours."

The landlady herself came; womanly curiosity or, far more likely, womanly tenderness for the two poor little motherless waifs drawing her thither with the strong instinct of the maternal heart.

"I beg your pardon, madam, but I want these two little folks put to bed and kept quiet. They have had a long ride and have got over-excited. Can you let them have all that they want and allow no one to see them except yourself until evening?"

"Oh, certainly, sir."

"Tum wid me to me own beddy, beddy, bed," she said, plucking up the little girl, who nestled her frightened little head at once on the great matronly bosom; "tum with me, my bonnie ittle boy," taking his hand; and out the trio sailed with feelings which that brace of men would have envied to the bottom of their souls if they could have realised what they were.

"Now, Smith, to business. Of course you

will leave York by an early train to-day."

Mr. Smith had not thought of it, had rather promised himself after all his toils and dangers some little indulgence, and looked as if he rather demurred to this. His master observed it with a kindling look of that ascendancy which he considered he held over Smith.

"Mark me, Smith. I'm not going to have you here to lead to identification. The further you get from this at once, the safer these youngsters from recapture and you from quod as a kidnapper of children. D'ye hear me, Smith?"

Mr. Smith did, and was not convinced. Some other "move" was behind that, he said to himself. He promised, however, to be in the train by two P.M. for the south.

"Right, Smith, and I'll remember it in the reward, but on one condition: you never peach about these children, mind, and you never inquire about them again after to-day."

Mr. Smith cared nothing about the children. His only object was to serve and please his clients.

"Bravo, Smith, that's the correct professional cut. You'll make your fortune yet in that

inquiry office line. I'll get other business for you in time, if I hear nothing more of this, you know. Remember now, that my name never escapes your lips, and you never indicate anything about me in any way to anyone until I wish it."

The gentleman was handling a pocket-book, with a good deal of a peculiar kind of crisp paper in it, as he spoke. Mr. Smith's mouth watered at the sight of all that wealth, which had a basilisk fascination for eye and heart, and he readily gave the desired promise.

Judging from the air of satisfaction with which he pocketed that sibilant crackling paper, he considered his fee a liberal one.

"You are sure, Smith, you left no trail."

"Sure as death, sir," said Mr. Smith, solemnly, and passed from his patron's presence, who wore a gratified smile, as he nodded dismissal and good-bye.

"I wonder what the doose did get those letters," said Mr. Smith to himself at the railway station, as he felt at every pocket in vain and shook his head sagely in the wise way of the semi-tipsy.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE BARGAIN COMPLETED.

IT was very early next morning, and the silent stars were watching the cab that stopped at an abode where "*bleeding with leeches*" could be done. Very solemn was the hour, very still; and the old church opposite re-echoed loudly to the cabman's knock at the door, and the crowded dead around that sanctuary might have seemed to hear and answer, so clearly responded the sepulchral void to the iron voice. It was but two o'clock as yet, and all but rakes, roysterers, and cracksmen were in profound oblivion, or wishing they were. A light at last appeared at an upper lattice. A figure huddled in flannels, a gown thrown over all as a mantilla, the empty sleeves dangling

in front like prolonged ears, noises from about the night-cap and the curl papers, feminine objurgations in fact on all unseasonable visitors while that figure waddled down the stairs. The door was soon ajar, and a nose experimenting on the outer airs.

"Bless my soul," the figure exclaims, "come into the house;" and, throwing open the front door, leaves the light in the front parlour, and flees into the upper gloom. Wheels are heard to go away, steps to enter, the door to close ere the lady has struck another light and made herself presentable. But she is wonderfully quick, notwithstanding, and is soon in decent fashion before her visitors.

"And those are they, Dacre?"

A little boy of five or six is awake and looking at her, a little girl is laid peacefully sleeping on the squab.

"Yes, they are now *your* children, Eliza."

"What is their name, Dacre?"

"Scaife—your own name."

Ah, that was what he meant. Then he ought to pay for it handsomely, thinks the lady.

"Will you take anything, Dacre? I can only



offer you a bottle of stout and some bread and cheese."

"Yes, thank you; that will suit me very well. My train goes in two hours, and I shall get nothing until nine o'clock. But first take these little folks away."

She proceeds to do so, but hangs over the sleeping girl longer than such a prosaic person might have been expected to have done.

"It is a beauty, and so like," she is saying to herself, half aloud, as she takes it in her arms, and leads the lad out to higher quarters.

"I said to you, Eliza," the gentleman remarks, as he finishes the last drop of his glass of porter, "that I would consider whether I should allow you something monthly for their keep or give you a lump sum down. My own inclination is to allow you something each month or quarter—" the lady gives a great start, and is going to speak, yet hesitates,— "but it might have inconveniences for you. I might be abroad, or short of cash, or fifty other things might cause irregularity. Hence I must take the course I care least about. Now, what will satisfy you, Eliza, to take these two children,

bring them up as your own, and, in short, do what you think proper with them?"

A hard, keen, bargaining look comes over the face of the woman, but she only answers indirectly.

"Well," she says, slowly, "they will be a great trouble, and I know you will like them nicely brought up."

"Oh, of course, carefully brought up."

"They'll be one person's work nearly. Then they'll want food, clothing, schooling, and the little one some nursing for awhile. They'll be a deal of bother to one at my time of life."

"Well, for the matter of that," says the gentleman, as if the bargaining spirit was being invoked in him, "they'll go well enough with your own children."

"Oh, yes," she interposes quickly, divining her danger in invoking *that*; she would have called Mumford a Bismarck in bargaining, if that genius had then come fully out; "and it will be a pleasure to do it for you, Dacre. Only I've got a business, and I shall have to choose betwixt them."

"Tut, tut, Eliza, a woman of your brains will

make them all go together. Tell me, what shall we say down on the nail *now*?"

That "now" is too much for Mrs. Scaife, and her eyes and face express eagerness, zeal in spite of her diplomatic instincts,—a great mistake. Her woman's cunning, however, soon comes to her aid. She replies in broken hints and looks that she will leave it to himself.

He counts out a mass of notes and spreads them before him.

"Will that do?"

Her eyes light into flash and lambent flame as she realises the amount.

"I've got it now, Eliza. I may not have it to-morrow, and I want you to have it. Mind now, two things I bargain for. I must have no bother with these children, and they must be forthcoming whenever I am passing through Manchester. And you must promise me that nothing but death shall part you and them."

The lady assents.

"Then take that pen and paper, and write me a letter to my dictation."

She stares.

"It is only putting the bargain we have just

made into black and white for the benefit of the relatives of these two young folks, who may want to see it, you know."

She takes the pen and prepares to write.

"DEAR MR. MUMFORD,

"I will gladly undertake the charge of bringing up the two young children which you have entrusted me with. I will treat them as my own. I will allow no one to take them from me except yourself, and will endeavour to bring them up so carefully that they shall always, when you call to see them, be found clean, well-clad, well-nourished, and healthy, as far as I can provide for it, and in every way reared as respectable children ought to be.

"Yours truly,

"ELIZA SCAIFE."

He takes the letter, places it composedly in his pocket-book where the money has lately been, and pushes the little hillock of notes over towards her. She takes them greedily, and yet, withal, feeling that she has been over-reached. In a little while he buttons his coat, saying that he must go now, but he will send from

London a portmanteau, perhaps two, containing some things which she will be able to make up into useful clothing for the children.

"I wonder what he wants that letter for? As a checkmate for me," she says to herself, as he passes up the street in the early dawn. "He's over-reached himself before now, and may do it again, clever as he is." But a glance at the notes kindles an exultant feeling which banishes every trace of doubt or twinge of fear. Cupidity is king, and at this moment he wears his crown in Mrs. Scaife's kingdom with jaunty satisfaction.

## CHAPTER XII.

## AT DEWSY MANOR.

MRS. MUMFORD had a trying season in Liverpool. Her husband had left her on "business," a periphrasis that covered everything and anything with him. At first it was for four days, then for another week, and then letter after letter named a future day for his return. But one pleasure relieved the tedium. She met with her old friend and schoolfellow, Mrs. Witton, went to her house, and got introduced to her son Roger, a lad of some sixteen, and her daughters, girls mostly his juniors.

Mrs. Mumford had more than one trouble with Biddy. That faithful henchwoman and nurse had taken the two children out and forgotten to return. When found she was still as faithful to her trust as her elevated condition allowed in

that bar-room among so many Irish stevedores and shouting swaggering women.

“’Deed, marm, it was only Tim O’Lanahan as oi hadn’t seen for twinty ye-ar. An’ he says to me, says he, ‘Biddy, let’s have a lashing o’ the crayther for the sake iv Ould Oireland.’ Me an’ Tim, marm, was girls together at Ballymahony.”

Again it happened, and Biddy was found with her face very red and her bonnet very much awry in a gin palace, hugging and kissing Beaty Asthore Machree, the little darlint, and otherwise going into excessive endearment. Hence, Mrs. Mumford was getting very restive when a letter came in, telling her to go home to Oxlea, near Lavenham, where he would soon join her. That letter bore the York postmark.

What had he to do there? He was not the man to make a pilgrimage to cathedrals and old shrines of religion. The Minster, the Lollards’ Tower, the ruins of St. Mary’s Abbey, or the Roman remains had no charms for him. What could he be after? Moreover, there was a postscript to the letter which puzzled her and set her feminine curiosity a-move.

“When you have time go and inspect Dewsy Manor, near Diss. I’m thinking of taking it as a residence in order to have a little gentleman farming, for I must find something to do. I have written to the present tenant asking him to show you over the house and grounds.”

Here was a fountain of vague expectations, of thoughts pleasant or otherwise, but assuredly not indifferent. She gathered up her belongings, including Biddy, who would not leave her even for the lashings galore of Liverpool, and flew like a wearied but hopeful bird safely to the early nest.

The old welcome, the old house, the old scenes, and the remnants of the old friends made the home-going very grateful. The old society was a real charm to her after so many years of exile. But the honours at Oxlea fell to the children. Two maiden aunts were there who fondled them, and, it must be confessed, petted and spoiled them to their heart’s content with kiss, cuddle, and cakes. Mrs. Mumford felt that there was enough of this; Biddy thought that there was far too much, and, in correcting moments, would shake them, declar-



ing that "she'd rattle the silfishness oot iv 'em whoil they was hyoung."

And Dewsy Manor? Did she go and approve? She could not tell why, but she shrank from it. It was an old Franklin's or Yeoman's house of the better class. A brick building, purple-red, roofed with thick, dark, plum-coloured, square tiles, the long, rambling kitchens and sculleries and dairy running alongside the by-road, and prolonged by a high, dead wall to an angle where the gate was found. Ingress here was obtained to a large, open spanse of garden and shrubs, showing a house with a good frontage and an imposing door, shadowed by a flat entablature supported on stout, round stone columns.

Inside the rooms were large and square, though rather low. There was abundance of accommodation within, and fine premises without for farming purposes. There were poultry-runs, dove-cote, home fields where noisy geese might gabble o'er the pool, or turkeys stalk majestic with their broods; everything for the children's use, everything for her own; and yet she did not care about Dewsy Manor. A good

home farm about it, a grand common close at hand, a picturesque fen leading down to the sluggish Waveney; woods here and there inclosing old halls, undulations lifting old churches into view, everything that might make an old country house acceptable was here. Why was she loath to love it as a home? She could not tell, but she had her misgivings. She felt sure she should never be happy therein. Was it that the house was full of forbidding ghosts that touched her mind unseen, or shot spectral-wise their doubts into her soul? She could not say, she could not give her reasons, but to Dewsy Manor she did not take. Ah! yes, there was the reason now she reflected, she said to herself, when coming outside she looked at the alders and willows lying thick on the near fringe of that coarse, tall grass, looked at those battalions of reeds, with the water glinting on every hand in lurking pools, tiny oblongs, circles, and serpentines, which stretched for a quarter of a mile down to the bed of the sleeping Waveney. Yes, she knew now it was the fen; and fen on the brain she carried away.

Fen meant fog, fog malaria, malaria typhoid, typhoid danger, if not death, to her two dear little chicks. The people said they suffered no inconvenience, saw nothing particular, though it made the place a little colder in the winter. Not much, though, for their children took no harm from it. But in summer—ah! that was the time—the mass of wild flowers was wonderful to behold, and so on. Nevertheless, she was still unpersuaded. It was the fen; she could not put up with that fen, and she would tell Dacre, when he came home next week, that she never, never, never could make up her mind to live at Dewsy Manor.

In due course, Mr. Mumford appeared at Oxlea. He was very close about his recent travels. "Urgent private affairs" met every inquiry. But if he was close on this matter, he was open as the day on another, and that was on Dewsy Manor. Why did she object? That was what he wanted to know.

She couldn't tell; she had a feeling that no good would come of it. Perhaps that fen would be the death of the children, or give them hoop, roop, or chronic bronchitis; or, in

short, there was no telling what it might not do.

"Stuff and nonsense! The people are healthy, and their children as well, and ours will be the same. The fact is, Nellie, we are going. I've taken over the lease, and mean to settle down to a little gentleman-farming, and you must find something to do, as my little Nellie always can," he said, turning the matter off playfully.

"Ah! Dacre, you always do that when you are most exacting, and want something out of us."

"Tut, tut! It's only a foolish fancy you've taken against Dewsy Manor. It's a nice old place; fine land around it for me, all sorts of knickknacks and contrivances indoors and out for you, your poultry, milk, cheese, butter, baking, brewing, housemaids, pantry, et cetera; two grand commons not far away, a fine old church with grand old tombs, and rusting sword, gauntlet, and helmet over them; nice families around—the clergyman is sprung from one of them,—a very pleasant squire near; the village only a mile away, where you can find poor enough for your patent medicines, soups, and caudles all the year round. No,

no, Nellie, don't be unreasonable. Whatever you may think of it, I am thankful. It is a far better place than ever I had hoped to end my days in. And, Nellie, my little witch," he said, endearingly, pulling her on his knee as she stood by the side of the fireplace, and thrusting into her hand a morocco case containing a magnificent pair of gold bracelets adorned with diamonds, "think of Mooranga, with its barbarisms, and the chance, after years of toil, of losing one's all by some cattle plague, or having one's brains knocked out by bushrangers, or of all being turned into cinders, children and all, by those infernal cowardly tribes of savages sending their burning arrows into our wooden buildings."

It was one of his rare moments when tenderness seemed uppermost, and he really wished to win her good-will.

She drooped her eyes as he kissed her, caring more for the kiss than the case of jewelled toys. Hers was a heart that went athirst for a little love. She did not rebuff his advances. These moments of tenderness were few and far between, and, therefore, very precious to a heart

hankering for a something seldom obtained. They were more than endurable, they were welcome, even although she felt something in her heart of hearts left still in reserve and never called out. He talked to her, as she sat quiescent on his knee, in gentle mood, appealingly almost for one of such a combative nature, and the unwonted voice and manner thawed down the sharp edges of her resistance. She could not dissipate her convictions, but she could for the moment give them scanty hearing, and his request to put aside her repugnance and give the place and him a fair trial fell on ears whose outworks were always won by a few kindly words of his. So she answered his kiss with one that seemed to herself to let go a world of boding alarms, and the drooping eyes rose and opened and looked him fully, frankly in the face as she repeated the seal of love.

So to Dewsy Manor they went with a full heart on Eleanor's part to make the best of everything. And the best seemed to come of it. The dreaded fen was a flower-garden all through the summer, where you might fill both hands with rare cups and stars, of white and

blue and pink, which grew nowhere else. It looked like a sea of tall rushes, browning with the months, relieved by bush and shrub. Autumn came, but there were no particular inconveniences from fog or milky cloud, no special hoast, no rheum, no pulmonary complaint, no febrile scourge.

There were neither in summer nor winter the intolerable trials of their late Australian home, and therefore, in the presence of such experiences, many prejudices died away. On the other hand, they had pleasant neighbours, families of long standing in the land, tendering a frank, genial welcome to the new-comers. Moreover, there were pleasant little errands to village and cottage, meetings with the clergy at their homes and her own; and altogether these satisfactions, with the material one of a good harvest and good luck with the dumb denizens of shippon, stall, and field, helped to banish every misgiving which Mrs. Mumford had once felt. And he had helped her; a satisfaction had sat on his countenance, a readiness of resource in hand and brain had appeared when settling down which had smoothed her

path. Though a lover of talk when it had a purpose in it, one who would converse as readily with beggar and labourer as with squire and peer, he was not naturally a sociable man in the sense of loving to be amongst a coterie or crowd of his fellows merely for the sake of meeting them; yet he had been good to her. He had gone with her—and she knew that it was secretly “against the grain”—to every gathering and party to which they had been invited, and almost with the air of a man, even to her, who liked it. He had seemed as if he wanted her to have friends to visit and receive in abundance.

The children were thriving splendidly. Millie could mangle the mother tongue in sweet, childish guise, and Beaty could run merrily about; and Biddy—that torment and affectionate necessity, who seemed to grow in clinging fondness for herself—was less troublesome, because the enemy was harder than ever to meet. Relatives were not far away, and the two maiden aunts were finding continual excuses for driving over for the day to dandle their little nieces and gossip with sister Nellie.



At last she was almost contented with her lot, and beginning to look out on life as a possible scene of heart's-ease and rest. Never in married existence had she known a more tranquil time than during the January and February after the rompings and parties of Christmastide were over.

A deep-set frost was on the land, a solemn stillness brooded over the fields. Robin and sparrow came catering after the oft-thrown crumbs, and low of kine or crackle of ice under foot sounded through the stilled airs with unaccustomed clearness and solemnity. The maid, as she went to milk or to draw at the well, drooped in gait, as if in a more reverent presence; ploughman and shepherd looked more on the ground, and seemed to tread more awesomely in that great, brooding calm. There was even a hush in men and women's voices, and the scold of the cottage appeared more absorbed and quiet than was her wont; nowhere did there seem a desecration of the brooding silence lodged within the curtains of that rimy air, save where the boys on the distant pond profaned the temple stillness in noisy

glee as they slid on treacherous foot or flew on mazy skate.

It was a season when charity awoke in that hushed repose to a deeper, profounder sensibility, and the brain pondered unbidden on expedients, and the hand and foot went willingly to work them out in relieving the woes of fireless and foodless homes. And Mrs. Mumford felt the solemnity in all the suppressed sublimity of its stilled voices, and heard the call from cot and hovel in all its plaintive tones to "come over and help us." And she was happy, very happy, in her own sweet, absorbed way, as she emerged to her astonishment into the captaincy over a band of ladies who recognised the worth and resource of the retiring little woman. Then the days grew busy, and the nights became thoughtful, until the relief had shaped itself into well-ordered avenues of operation. The burdened time was closing in deep-whispered heart satisfactions, the gentle echoes of louder thanks outside, when she stood again one evening by the blazing logs. Again there was the same look of content with her, almost of tenderness, certainly of admira-

tion, on the face of her husband, and values of his managing little wifey's right goodwill.

He pulled her down upon his knee, pressed her pale face to his great chest, praised her with the quoted praises of other men and women. She felt gratified, almost at rest in heart with him. They talked cordially, on her side affectionately, and he looked at her with eyes that seemed for a moment to dim over their steely keenness with a tender dew. Then there was silence, heart-fulness on her side, a subdued sigh from deepest soul-recesses on his. She raised her head quickly; her thought was to speak, to inquire, to learn what was that moan as of a regret coming from the deep Hades of perturbed spirits. But that whisper, which comes to woman like second sight and divination direct, said, "Ask not; put away the wish; turn the apparent theme." She did. She rushed upon another subject to cover the confusion of the moment.

"Dacre dearest, you remember what Mr. Chapman said when he wished us to give an eye to his children? What are you doing

about them? Ought they not to be brought up here with our own?"

"No—certainly not. Let me never hear any more, Nellie, on that subject."

It was said in his sharpest, most grating, and most intolerant tones.

"Well, love, but——"

"No, not another word. *I'll* look to matters of that kind."

He rose as he spoke, and she only avoided sliding off his knee to the hearth by the quickness which her terrors gave her.

She was still standing confused with the suddenness of his revulsion when the door closed, and she knew he was gone. When she saw him again there was a different aspect on his countenance, and he affected to treat it as a trifle caused by a sudden spasm, to which he said he had lately become subject; but she observed that it was long before he gave her again the slightest indication in his manner that she might speak of anything which he wished to keep to himself.

But whither did he go from that drawing-room? He went to a study which he called

his factotum-room, where he wrote hordes of letters, and reviewed his army of accounts, and kept his safe. He stood for awhile frowning with his back to the fire and the lappets of his coat in his hands. Angry thoughts, upbraiding thoughts, were flickering over his mind like shadow-clouds over fields of corn. It was a bitter mood he was in, such as gives energy to certain kinds of thought.

"Ah! I've neglected that matter, and she will see them, and be asking some awkward questions."

He lit a candle and moved to a room opposite, unlocked some drawers, and gazed at their contents.

"Yes, better out of the house at once," he murmured to himself, softly, as he turned his eye on a couple of portmanteaus in a corner of the chamber.

He went out of the room to the nursery, where Biddy was sitting brooding before the fire, and set her to the task of packing the two trunks with the plenishment of the drawers. Then he shut himself up in his study again.

“Who, shure now, it’s his own; the stockin’s, an’ shirruts, an’ flannins the poor gintleman had in these thrunks when he doid in Australy. He made me feel in ’em till oi got the p’haypers he put unther his piller an’ doid wid there. ‘Biddy,’ he said, giving me a goold sovereign, ‘they’re for mee childer.’ Then the fits came on, and he niver knew anythin’ more, but just muttered and babbled about Florrie an’ Lusthrange, but oi couldn’t make all out. Shure now, oi wunther what’s got thim two spalpeens. Missis isn’t happy about ’em at all at all, an’ wunthers and wunthers where masther’s put ’em. An’ if anybody should have their father’s old cloze, it’s the little childer. Masther might send ’em these two thrunks to warrum ’em, for the time’s cruel cowl’d. By the powers, oi’d set the missis to ask, but he trates all her swate love as if it were peelin’ of praties. What a noice shirrut! an’ thim stockin’s is illigant,” she said, laying them tenderly in order in the portmanteau. “Ah!” she exclaimed, suddenly stopping as if a thought had struck her, “it lays heavy on me sowl to keep them p’haypers, if oi can git ’em to the little uns. Oi’ll try the

masther, an' see if oi can git it out iv him. But it's the black looks he'll give me for a month o' Sundays."

She went to the door and knocked.

"Come in."

"Did yer honour say oi should pack up the big men's stockin's for the childer too? They'd fit me, an'——"

"You impudent huzzy! when did I tell you they were going to any children?"

"Och, shure now, sur-r, things is allus going to childer ivery day out o' this house. Yesterday missis made me pack up some things. 'They'll be nice for the childer will Beaty's old stockin's,' says she; an' the day before she——"

"That was for the villagers. These are not going to them, and I never told you that they were for any children. They're going away, all of them, and mind you pack everything up in those drawers without fail."

"Shure now, oi ask yer honour's pardon, but oi thought widin meself that you said——"

"I'm afraid, Biddy, you've been having one of your strong drams, and have muddled matters."

"No, yer honour, oi could take me oath——"

"That'll do, Biddy. Get the packing done."

("I'll not have a shred of those things in the house to annoy me," said Mr. Mumford, betwixt his teeth.)

"Oi'm shure them things is going to the childer. Oi know masther when he's fratchin'. Oi'll goo and git the parcel o' p'haypers."

From the recesses of her big trunk Biddy drew a flat packet, sealed and tied with red tape, and committing it to her capacious pocket, which was equal to storing a good-sized bottle, she descended and finished her work. She then informed her master that all was packed up. With a frown he gave her a couple of keys, telling her to lock the port-manteaus and return the keys at once to him.

She opened the lesser one, searched carefully for the secret pocket, and then looked stealthily round the room, for fear that even a ghost might see her.

"If the missis, poor thing, could ha' done it, it's herself that should ha' had these p'haypers long ago. But she'd have given him them wid all the swate trust in the



wor-rld, and the poor childer would niver ha' got their own, at all at all. He was a noice gintleman, and a most illigant corrupts, an' it's a pity his childer wouldn't ha' the packet. What's in't?" she muttered, gazing intently at it. "Oi niver durst open it, for fear the poor gintleman should come back to me. Ah! poor sowl, ye'll be content even in Glory at what oi'm doing now," said Biddy, solemnly. "Many's the faults of Biddy, but she's allus thrue to her frinds."

She put in the packet, locked and strapped up the trunks as tight as she could, and then returned the keys to her master. The next morning the portmanteaus were sent away.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## DURANCE.

THE world might be going well with Mrs. Scaife. "Bleeding with leeches," a department of her business which she never cordially liked, has disappeared from her window, and a smarter bonnet and mantle have come like a brighter vision over her portly person. The neighbours have felt the change.

"Thah yorney, conna thah see," says Flash Charley, the cock of the street, pushing his hands deep into his pockets and ceasing from that clog-dance which he has been performing in wondrous shakes, trills, and stamps with those marvellous clogs, brass-toed and brass-eyeletted in front until they are pitted like pumice-stone—"conna thah see, mon, hoo geets preouder an preouder ivery day?"

"Weel, that's nohn s'yessy," replies his pal, one of the cleverest thieves in Angeldom, a gentleman with an extensive acquaintance among "the force," and much local knowledge of several large mansions kept up by public subscription to supply board and lodging gratis to their class; "hoo allis wor preoud. Hoo's getten eyne that leek at a felly as if he wor nowt but muck unther her shoon."

These gentlemen have felt the iron enter into their souls as they have tendered the honour of their acquaintance and been disdained by the haughty fair. But Angel Street generally has noticed the change, has discussed it warmly over beer and whisky at the bar of the "Packer's Arms," and has grown interested.

Ladies not given to following the latest fashions so carefully as many of us love to behold, and often seen in Angel Street with black and blue and blake adornments about eyes and nose which we deplore too much to admire, have become fawning and officious in their desire to brighten up a very dim acquaintance. Gentlemen of the Charley type have endeavoured, with sneaking condescension or

appealing impudence, to do the same; have spoken to her, knocked at her door about unnecessary matters, saluted and given unappreciated greetings, asked unnecessary questions, shown an effusive affection for her and hers; all of which has been silently ignored in the old style to their own puzzlement, but not much to the increase of the olden dislike, for Mrs. Scaife is far too prudent to give any grave offence in such a locality. She merely wishes to abridge familiarity, and cannot afford neighbouring, even if she desires it, which she never did.

But Angel Street is impressed, for it is convinced that she is "in luck," and may yet take small toll, notwithstanding all this stiffness of madam's. At best it will be only in small vails, judiciously given for sundry pints and quarts, but the greater desire of closer intimacy will remain unsatisfied.

Let us pass that portal so sternly denied to the Charlies, Jemimas, and Sallys of this celestial quarter.

It is morning. Mrs. Scaife's voice is heard calling out, "Eliza Ann, take 'em up their porridge!" We pass upstairs with the girl, a

little sister climbing laboriously after us. We enter at the top of the house a great attic, stuffy and close. There is still life in abundance. A rickety four-legged table, with one leg badly maimed, stands in the centre. Round the sides of the room are some rush-bottomed chairs burst through, the rushes shedding downwards, like bewildered straws, to the floor. There is a fire-grate, dead with old ashes and soot that soil it and the hearth drearily. In a corner is a bed, tumbled and disordered, just as it has been left. A three-legged stool lies on its back with its legs appealing to the ceiling. Little garments, little shoes lie here and there on that floor of bare boards, stained with many hues. The lean-to ceiling is blackened, the walls are a dim, mousy colour. There is no window save that skylight in the roof. A look of neglect, a look of squalor reigns despotic about the room.

But there is something else on which the eye rivets. Two children are there, a little boy and a younger girl. They are playing in languid style, and with wan, unchildish spirits. They move silently, for they are shoeless. Two

or three bits of wood amuse the boy, a few rags and the headless stump of a doll, shedding out its tattered internals, serve the girl for play-things. The lad's clothes have lost all their smartness and neatness, albeit they are not yet worn into holes; but they are fluffy with bits of cotton and thread, seedy with neglect, dirty, unbrushed. His jacket and trousers are stained with gouts of grease and filth. His waistcoat is off, showing a sombre shirt, buttonless at the neck and wrists. His hands are dirty, his face is sticky and blotched with yesterday's bread and treacle. His beautiful, warm, brown hair, erst so glossy, is matted, dusty, nay, rusty for want of comb and care. His complexion is tallowy; his beautiful, blue-grey eyes, with the long, girlish, black lashes, which gave them such a witching look, are lurid rather than bright, a leaden, glooming crescent gathering below each orb. The girl is even worse. Her pinafore is a mass of dirty spots, her stockings are down, her dress is frayed at the bottom; her neck and breast are bare and dim for want of washing. Where are the pearl and pink that lately formed her complexion? the dimples that

were liquid in their motions on cheek and chin? the merry laugh that shook her chubby little frame? the soft, velvet curves of her fine-cut, oval face? the silver of her arching brow? the swanny hue that sat upon her lovely little throat? And her hair!—that beautiful, curly crown of saffron films—where is that wondrous fell of silken strands which have lit up like shining golden tissue in a morning sun? Why this dim sorrel of claggy, matted tresses? Are these the two children, bright with health and cleanliness, whom we saw breakfasting in Arkengarth Farm full of infantine laughter and glee? They would not have had that troubled hair, those dirty hands, those clarty faces and seedy garments in a reformatory, or even in one of those more imposing palaces of guilt to which we still consign juveniles of tender years for naughtiness as well as crime, ere we import them into some remedial home, which their wronged, neglected state demands of right.

“How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” says head to heart, as we notice with a pang, a stab of sharp, in-

dignant pain, these bright little creatures that were frolicking so blithely around homestead and meadow such a little while ago.

The girl has kicked open the door for us, in order that we may see it all. She has put the tray down on the rickety table with a bang—that tray which groans under the wealth of two small plates of porridge and a jug of milk skimmed down to a rich sky-blue,—and, under the thump and collision, the rocking table threatens destruction to the provender. The boy's hand stays the overturning jug.

“Thar!” snorts Eliza Ann, with all the native scorn of a “superior person,” and turns to go.

The children are starting ravenously to eat the porridge, when the boy checks himself and his sister. He puts his hands together, says a few words reverently, and then they attack the mess with avidity. All has disappeared, the last drop of the well-skimmed has gone, and yet the boy is testing if that stony-hearted jug will yield another drop of milk, when the little girl's hands go together as if she were saying her prayers. “F’ what-we-seed-amen,” all in one breath. Then they amuse themselves in



the same old manish, old womanish way, without a smile, without a laugh, nay, even without a childish quarrel, until there is a little alleviation of their lot, if such there may be to-day. When visitors are not expected, Mrs. Scaife allows them to come down to play for a few hours in the back room, and then she appears to have a little pleasure in tidying up the girl, in whom she seems to observe some likeness to some one being who has had an interest for her secret soul. Once or twice a month she has bewildered them by taking them out into the crowded, jostling streets, so unlike anything they have ever seen before, and the little things have cried in their loneliness at seeing so many cold, unsympathising faces; for they have been always used to look at so few, and every one so warm with love, light, and coaxing pleasure.

To-day she takes them out, for some reason known to herself, and avoids the haunts of men. Hailing an auxilium, the ancestor of the modern 'bus, she passes along Collyhurst, and gives them a ride past fine houses and green fields. Then they get out and walk where daisies and bluebells grow. They pass through a little

wood and emerge into a beautiful dell where a stream runs and turns the wheel that sets the millstone to pulverise the corn.

They are in the well-known Boggart's Hole Clough. What transmuting influence has come over that boy? The pasty complexion has disappeared; his cheeks are pink, his eye alight, his countenance aglow, while rollicking, screaming, and laughing as though intoxicated with the ozone and ether of an enchanted air. The girl is excited and rapidly changing, but her little legs will not move apace with the boy's. It is wild pleasure with both, a break in the dreadful monotony of their young lives which will shine out afar off as a spot of sunshine coming through cloud-rift on a louring day. The unwonted softness of manner and indulgence lasts until the children are on the verge of fatigue, when she leads them back through the Clough to find another conveyance, and give them another ride home. What angel of beauty has flitted from cheek and eye during that ride? When they get out of the auxilium at the top of Angel Street, the pasty looks have usurped the glowing rose-tints, and the little eyes are heavy and dull with weariness.

She gives them a good tea in this same indulgent mood, and, as the little folks revive, wheels are heard at the door. It is the parcels-van from the railway, bringing two trunks to her and a great deal of speculation to Angel-dom, which cannot understand why cabs and vehicles should so often pass their own doors and carry the "luck" to hers.

"It is his handwriting," she says to herself, as she examines the address, but she is self-restrained enough to let the little folks have their fill before she dismisses them to another room. Then she takes out of her pocket the tiny keys which came in a letter that morning and indulges her woman's curiosity, fastening first the door and overhauling them alone. "Humph! there are trousers, and coats, and vests enough to last the boy until manhood, and linen enough for Eliza Ann and Florrie till they want long clothes."

She is putting the things back with an air of tired curiosity, when her hand strikes against the side of the little portmanteau, and interest arouses again. She feels something, and searches for the secret entrance. A parcel of

documents is obtained, wrapped in stiff, crackling paper. She opens it to see what they are about. Paper? No, there is a parchment also. She reads the latter carefully, as well as the other documents. There is a point of burning light in each eye, an almost hectic spot of excitement on each cheek-bone, gathering while she reads them through.

"I've got him now," she mutters to herself, in a deep tone of profound satisfaction, while she carries off the documents to some receptacle where she knows they will be safe.

Her manner after this begins to soften towards the two children, as if they have acquired a new value for her, but most of all towards the girl, who seems to rouse in her an instinctive interest the more she looks at her now. What reminiscence does that little face and one little document she has found in that parcel, signed with a clergyman's name, flash up in her mind? Thereby hangs a tale, but henceforth the little features and the lovely hair know no more of the old neglect, and the children see less of that attic and more of those fields than of late.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## TRAVAIL.

“OH! Peggy, don’t flite and stevin so. Let Nanny be. I’m clean maddled and moidered.”

The pained, stunned face that has looked up so white and wan drops again into the hands of the bowed woman, and low groan follows groan as the shoulders rise and the breast heaves.

Peggy’s weaker character has been able to find relief in scolding Nanny, the servant, for losing the two children ; but Rebekah’s anguish is very different. She is utterly undone, this woman of the iron will. They had brought her home scarcely conscious when she saw that they were hopelessly lost, and here she has sat, almost motionless, almost in a semi-swoon, her

elbows on her knees, her weary, fainting head on her open hands. For two hours, giving no sign of life, in a dreadful, alarming daze, has she sat thus; while poor Peggy, as if it were a propitiatory offering to the manes of the deeply-stricken, has abused Nanny with all her heart, stevining or shouting until the house has rung again. At last this appeal. Then the softnesses of femininity have made the quarrelling pair turn solicitous to the bowed form.

“Coom, conny, coom. Dunnot gie way se-a. Tak a sup o’ tea.”

A groan and a shake of the head.

“Bekah! Bekah! t’ barns’ll be fund, ah’ll warrand that. Pluck up yer sperrits an’ tak summat. We’ll all gan seeking ’em i’ a bit. Do, conny, tak this cup o’ tea.”

No answer, and servant and mistress stand looking at her, while the great kitchen-clock ticks loud and solemn as a knell. Then poor Peggy’s eyes fill at the sight, and she sinks down into a chair and wails aloud.

At last the stunned, expressionless face—oh! so many years older-looking than at that happy breakfast scene in the morning—lifts, and seems

to intimate without words that it will take refreshment. The two peasant women, with the beautiful insight of their sex, seem to apprehend by a spiritual agency, and run to the tea and administer it with tender, gentle alacrity, mingling therewith soothing, loving, comforting words. The tea revives her a little, the kindly caresses and endearing speech more, and she mutely gives them thanks. Then Jack appears to announce that he has got the best horse in Arkengarth Dale promised for dawn to-morrow morning, when they will start again in pursuit. Why can't they start that instant? No; they may not have the horse, and they cannot travel if they might.

"Coom, conny woman, lig down a bit an' get some sleep, an' then ye'll be as lish as iver, Mrs. Bostock."

The strong intellect asserts itself, and she yields. They put her to bed as if she were a child, and she drops asleep in the very weariness of grief and prolonged exertion. She awakes before dawn, and rises at once.

"Shall I go to Mr. Fossett first?"

No, that will run away with two days; too

much time has already been lost. She will write now and see him afterwards. By the candlelight on that May morning she pens her sorrowful epistle, and at the first glimmerings of dawn Jack is helping her into the taxed-cart. Past Feetham, over Bolton Moors, by Redmires to Leyburn, to Bedale; and all in vain, though the scent is warm and many tell them of seeing the fugitives. At last the trail is lost.

"Northallerton Station?" suggests Jack.

A nod, and away they go. The porters have not seen the party.

"They'd mak for York," says one of them.

Rebekah dismisses Jack, and takes the first train. Up and down the York streets the poor woman goes, some pitying her, others almost smiling at her expectation of discovering a clue. She enters a street near the minster, where house approaches so near to opposite house with each storey, until at the top the neighbours can almost reach across and shake hands. She rests, refreshes, inquires. The landlady is compassionate and thoughtful.

"Here's a man can help you for a trifle, ma'am."



A little, ferretty-looking man he seems, with a liking for the task. They begin with common lodging-houses in various streets and courts. All in vain. Next the beer-houses. Still in vain. The better inns ; but they do not succeed there.

"It's no use goin' to wheer t' quality puts up?" he asks, doubtfully.

"Yes, go even there."

They turn to the "York Tavern." The reply is, "The gentleman left last night with the two children for the station." They discover at the station that he took tickets for Leeds. At Leeds poor, tired Rebekah loses all clue, and, for the first time in her quest, sits down in despair. Tears leave the stern eyes and run down the hard-featured face. A pitying official endeavours to obtain some information, and comes back with the opinion that they will have gone on to some of the great Lancashire towns, and most probably Manchester. Thither she proceeds, arriving in the grey morn. No seeking of hers and her detective throws any light upon the case. Once they seem near discovery. A cabman is found who took them up at the Victoria Station to convey them to that

at London Road, but midway the gentleman alighted with the two children and paid him off, saying that he would not go forward to-night. No other cabman is found who will say he took them up. She leaves for Liverpool, goes to other great towns like Bolton, Blackburn, Wigan, Preston; seeks in the same methodical manner, and with the like disappointing, heart-sickening result. Everywhere she and her agent are baffled. The police seem sometimes as if they cannot understand her.

"Are the children yours?"

"No."

"Do you know whose they are?"

"No."

"Can you give us any idea of anyone who can have an interest in stealing them?"

"No."

And so some wise ones shake their heads and seem to conclude that the woman is in a frenzy, and has never lost any children at all—the hardest thing of all to bear.

After six weeks of weary hunting in town and purlieu, she is quite knocked up, as well as successless. She must go home to rest. She

writes to Mr. Fossett to meet her on the way—nothing on earth will induce her to enter Whisselton again except his illness. He does so.

“There is one man,” he says, “who wanted to have these children in his own hands as joint trustee, but I scarcely can think that he would risk stealing them. Besides, I have got a letter lately from him. It is a London letter, and in it he proposes to make a certain allowance—and a liberal one, too—for their maintenance. He also incloses the first quarter’s payment, and only stipulates that he may be allowed to see them whenever he comes our way. Here is his letter.”

Mrs. Bostock feels so strong a curiosity to see it that she holds her hand out for it as if by instinct. He gives it her. Straight, strong strokes, with curious little sharp angles in some letters; a hand that is not remarkable, but yet easy to remember. She returns it with a thoughtful face.

“If it were not a business one, you should keep it, Rebekah.”

“I shall know that hand, sir, among ten

thousand. The lines are as hard and cruel as doom."

"You think so? Anyway, I'll write to him and ask him plain out if he knows anything about this business."

"There's no address, sir."

"Upon my word, there is not! What shall I do?"

A suspicion that had assailed him from the first, that things were not quite canny, deepens with this little incident, and, after a thoughtful pause, he says,

"Rebekah, go back to Arkengarth and get up your strength for another search. We must recover these children."

"I will, sir, or I'll die on the tramp after them."

There is great welcome at Arkengarth, great regret at her worn appearance, great promise that she shall soon be as well as ever, and great effort to cheer her in every homely way they can. But the strength does not return quickly where the heart is pining and longing, and there is little to cheer in the letters of those officers whom she has employed and desired to

forward her the result of their investigations. And no reports seem so hopeless as those which come in from Manchester. After such letters the early grief in the early form returns. Peggy, learning little by experience, then again attacks Nanny for her carelessness, stevins in the old style, with the old result : all the " govisons," " slaitches," " rummledusters," " femmering slindges," " feckless ket," and " daft fwoak," with other windy missiles which she hurls at her hand-maiden's head, failing to help Rebekah in her fit of depression. At such moments of bad news Mrs. Bostock seems to frenzy, walking up and down the kitchen talking to herself, while the Metcalfes look on quite awed ; or going to the settle at the little window, to look out on the homely garden, and gaze into vacancy.

" Poor creether ! she sees them barns playing amang t' pansies an' primroses, an' then she sees they're nut here."

Sometimes the distraught air passes away with dissolving tears ; sometimes it intensifies. They hear her at night pacing up and down in her chamber. Once she has got up, gone down-

stairs, and wandered about the garden under the great August moon, looking among the hollyhocks and under the gooseberry-bushes for something which she could not find, two night-capped heads the while, with very round eyes, at the window overlooking her.

"Poor, poor Bekah! she's getting clean maddled."

"She's gine daft, clean daft," replies Frank.

To-day there will be relief. Rebekah is sipping her tea with that look which you only see on the face of an invalid recovering, and when the terrible, grave-bearing illness has been arrested. Cousin Peggy is in great spirits. She hangs about her in endearing little offices, with the light of hope in her eye, the touch of subdued joy on her gentle hand, the hush of a great happiness felt in the very breath which seems first to pass warming over her thankful heart. Rebekah wakes up to a kind of peace as she reads in those homely faces and in those solicitous looks a great, tender interest in her and her unmerited wrongs. The eyes dim as she puts the cup down, but they can talk to her now, and, docile as a little child, she answers

their wondering questions about the great fatigue and the weary, luckless hunt she has had after those two children that have woven themselves around her very soul. They marvel at the strange places, the tale of miles traversed, the devices tried and found unsuccessful in their quest. They are all ears and eyes when footsteps enter the dairy adjoining.

"It mun be about summat."

It is Jack's voice.

"Niver mind, Nanny, gan an' gie it to Mrs. Bostock. It'll happen dea her good."

"Lawks, Jack, what's t' use uv a bit o' paper? It's nobbut a bit o' thee whay-say" (*pretence*).

Jack insists upon her taking it in.

Rebekah clutches the scrap of letter greedily. Her eyes seem to start nearly out of her head.

"It *is* his handwriting! Jack!"—shouting to him outside—"where did you get this?"

Jack explains, and Nanny remembers that it was there she had her struggle with Mr. John Smith.

Rebekah learns that Jack saw this letter lying in the bottom of the hedge, and, being

neither able to read nor write, had thought he should like to know its contents, and therefore had brought it home. It is only a piece of a letter, giving nothing very definite, having been torn across as if the receiver had used half of it for lighting his pipe, but containing hints that set Rebekah's curiosity aflame.

"I must take Jack with me to that place," she says.

They seek carefully for some time, and apparently in vain, until an earth-stained something is found which when opened turns out to be two short notes difficult to decipher.

"I'm glad Mrs. Scaife, Angel Street, Manch . . . . to be Eliza . . . ."

The other says,

"Bring them . . . 'York Tav . . .'"

It is signed cautiously, "Yours, J. D. M."

Her woman's wit leaps swiftly to where her suspicions had pointed, and she knows the name which that "M." initials.

As they gaze at her, she seems to grow erect before their eyes, and the weary looks of weakness and faintness are passing away before a shaping resolution. She will wait until Mr.



Fossett either writes or comes to see her, she tells them, and then she must be off. She seems to recover strength now rapidly during the few days she is awaiting his reply. At length a letter comes containing money, and bidding her be wary, and get assistance, if she can, of the right sort in order to succeed.

"I am but poorly, scarcely equal to a little bottom-fishing, or I would have preferred to have seen you personally on this matter. Be cautious, and send me word where you have gone after recovering them. It will not be well to return to Arkengarth Farm. When you have got settled with them again, I hope to come and tell you who they are and what I know about them."

Rebekah felt the force of this advice. On the third evening after, there might have been seen a tall woman in a great cloak asking in Angel Street at dusk where Mrs. Scaife's house might be found.

"Hoo lives theer," was the response of a knowing little man, that immediately set to work at the clog-dance again, while he kept an eye on the woman's movements.

The inquirer passed the house slowly, and disappeared down the street.

"Aw wonder if hoo's sent by some felly that wants to goo in for a burst?" (*housebreaking*) he muttered thoughtfully to himself. "It'll be omost like doing a jug (*robbing a bank*) theer neaw," he said, reflectively, as he ceased his jig. "Hoo geets preawder an' preawder, finer an' finer, ivery day. Aw should like to crack her."

But the reflection that his style of cracking was known amongst his own select society in Angeldom, and might be known to Mrs. Scaife, somewhat damped the ardency of aspiration.

"Hoo's that wakken it'll be as hard to do a screwing theer as to geet into a Peter," (*a safe*), he maundered to himself.

Ultimately, like more distinguished philosophers, he turned his disquieted thoughts from the unfathomable problem to more mundane matters. It was the voice of the charmer and the eye feminine which next took him captive. He obeyed the whispered "Follow me, but not close," of a female passing up the street some time after the woman with the cloak had gone out at the other end; followed her into a secret

chamber, and, when the little conference was over, the compact was completely arranged.

Next day Eliza Ann and the children were in the fields by Collyhurst, and a stout, strong girl was with her whom she had picked up as a companion by the way. The two children were playing merrily some distance ahead. A woman was seen loitering behind, who came and engaged their attention. A man, who had previously passed along in front screened by a hedge, suddenly rose from the ground and coaxed the boy towards him, but failed to induce the little girl, who turned timid at the stranger's voice, and refused to go to him for the goody. She began to cry as her little brother trotted off with the stranger whither the path broke in a little descent to the stream that runs through Medlock Vale.

As the man disappeared, the woman seemed disconcerted. Suddenly she ran towards the little girl, seized her, and began to make off after the man. The two girls instinctively seemed to understand the plot. The stronger one ran swiftly after the woman, seized hold of Florrie, and was struggling hard with her

when Eliza Ann's screams alarmed the kidnapping female. She dropped the child and ran quickly along the road by which the man had disappeared. The stronger girl remained guarding Florrie, while Eliza Ann seemed paralysed after she had run some distance, and stopped to scream and cry. Houses were not far off, and some of the women came to the doors, looked over their little garden-hedges, apparently unable to understand the case. One or two came out towards her across the field, and learnt the story of the kidnapping. Loud was the din then, and wild the hunt along the many paths which broke away from the main one near the stream. But much time had been lost, and it was long ere they met with one who had seen the man and the boy together. And, when they had traced him up to a definite point, they learnt that he had disappeared in a vehicle which came up mysteriously at the very moment in which it was most wanted. As for the woman, she was not seen by anyone, and it was inferred, when too late for a search, that she had found a refuge in some house near until the dusk had set in.

That night, in a little house in a back street in the very heart of the great city, a tall, stern-looking woman was introduced to a select circle. A boy was lying asleep on a mattress in a corner. A knowing-looking man was talking to another, seen at a glance to be a rough and a dandy, and to a woman who had acquired the gaol-bird's sinister, half-cowed looks.

"Nay, nay, lad, a fin (*bank-note*) apiece is good pay," he said to the murmuring rough.

"Dunno yo think, Ann, that we owt to ha' another fin atwixt us for lifting this lad? We'n might ha' had a stretch to do for 't."

The lady loudly protested that fifteen pounds—three fivers or fins—was not too much. Besides, they had had expenses, cabs and hush-money to pay.

The knowing gentleman smiled, and declared that he always liked to do the "square" thing by his friends; but it was only a small matter, and they had really failed in their mission.

"Why didn't they nick (*catch*) the girl, that's what he wants to know?"

Well, they would do, only they couldn't, &c., and they grew excuseful and apologetic, look-

ing as much at their ease as people generally do under such circumstances.

"Quarter pay's my notion for half-work in such cases as this," the knowing-looking man remarked, in a hard tone. They murmured loudly. "Well, Flashy, mind you serve me well next time if I get you more for this."

Charley vociferated that he would.

"Hush! she's here."

The door opened. The head of a stranger peered in, seeking something whose all-absorbing importance shut out every other consideration. The eye rested upon the bed, and the whole woman seemed instinctively to be drawn thither; a tall woman, bending sorrowfully over the pallet, murmuring to herself, unheeding aught else, "Sorely changed, sorely changed!" but she kissed him fervently at each word.

The lesser younger woman had started, astonished. Her hand seemed to rise of itself, as if to strike, while her face filled with passion and glaring wrath. She followed the unheeding figure up to the couch, as if nothing but a blow would relieve her feelings. The knowing-

looking man stretched out his hand with a forbidding motion, and she slunk back.

"Sorely changed, sorely changed!" murmured the woman to herself. "His little sister will look as bad, quite as bad."

There was silence in the room, and they heard a great, gurgling inner sob as the strong woman struggled with herself, and a solitary tear trickled from those stern eyes and rolled down the hard, furrowed cheeks. The lesser female's passion seemed to be ebbing away while she gazed at the tall, lank woman suppressing her great heart-trouble. The latter at length turned round, after another great kiss, and gazed upon the two observant men and the woman with her natural undaunted air. Her eye hardened as it fell upon the latter, but otherwise she stood calm, silent, and unmoved. Why was there no suggestion of violence now in her manner?

The knowing-looking man was about to say something with a kind of apologetic nod, when the female anticipated him borne forward by some sudden gust of feeling.

"Mrs. Bostock, I'm glad you've gotten him,

if it's only to spite that thief Smith, what stole him."

A flash came into Mrs. Bostock's eyes.

"Then you know something about that wicked kidnapping?"

She acknowledged that she did.

"Who set him to do it?"

"She couldn't tell. Smith never told her. Ay, he was a bad un."

"And you helped the bad man?"

"Yes, she was vexed with herself now that she did."

A spasm of hate flitted across her face that testified to the truth of this.

"The fact is, ma'am, she believes Smith robbed her of her share of the swag," said the knowing-looking man.

Ann Gresley grew more angry.

"A nasty, oily, sneaking good-for-nowt; if ever we catch him, Charley, in Angel Street, won't we land him some hot uns, a vile——"

Ann Gresley's face grew more furious and fiendish, apparently at the thought of being bilked so shamefully.



"Was that all the wrong, Gresley, that he did you?"

Rebekah's question seemed to quicken every sleeping serpent of the Eumenides in Ann's mind, and foul oaths left her lips as two white hot points gathered in Mrs. Bostock's scornful eyes.

Yes, Ann, you are suffering the pangs of a woman scorned rather than a person cheated; and that tall, stern member of your sex sees deep down into your mind and the sea of gall through which the serpents swim.

"This here talk's no use," says the knowing-looking man, "and I've another job on hand in Broughton. You must come wi' me, ma'am. And Charley and you, Ann, mind, mum's the word. If you follow us or give any bloke the orfice, I'll—as sure as I'm alive."

"If you could afford another fiver to split atween 'em," he whispered to Rebekah, "I think I'd stand it, if I were you. It'll make 'em fly about this, and hot to nail the girl for you."

She nodded a careless Yes, and the man turned to them, saying,

"You see, the lady pays handsome."

"Gresley, if I were you, I'd sue Smith for breach," whispered Rebekah.

Ann seemed to shrink and shiver under the tone and imputation, as Mrs. Bostock and the knowing-looking man, carrying the sleeping boy, passed cautiously out into the rainy, misty night.

## CHAPTER XV.

## TWO LETTERS AND TWO TRUSTEES.

IT is an autumnal day, with something in the air which tells of change treading on the golden heels of summer. Mr. Fossett leaves the rectory in a slow, thoughtful way with rod and net in hand and basket slung from his shoulder. He makes sedately for the old church, unlocking the little chancel postern, and leaving his rod and other implements leaning against the wall outside. His steps echo very forlornly along the aisle flags. The old quivers, suspended so grotesquely above the pews, swing slightly in the breeze which comes through the open door. Their very motion is as solemn as the slowly-shaking head of one in mournful mood. He wanders up and down, as if to see that everything is clean and in order

for the next service—faded, dingy as all appears. He has always been an enemy to “restoration.”

“It takes the old life out of a church, sir, and we cease to see it as our fathers saw and knew it, when they came to service, marriage, or funeral. The very uncouthness of the oak settles and the inartistic inscriptions bring thoughts and lessons to my heart of old custom and homely worth which none of your spic and span newnesses ever can. No, sir, I like to worship, as my fathers did, with the dear old surroundings.”

He looks long into the old reading-desk and pulpit, where he has so often gone during the last forty-five years, looks at cushion and hangings as if peering for specks of dust, then turns slowly away and leans over the side of an old, square pew near, resting his arms upon the closed door. There is a pensive softness in his eyes and on his lips and cheeks, as of one luring gentle shadows out of the far and near labyrinths of memory into view.

“Jim, that fell at the head of his company in India, sat there. Oswald, my poor nephew, who

got drowned at Oxford, loved that corner. Betwixt them sat my sweet flower Alice, so like and yet so unlike the golden-haired seraph that was lately in my house. In that other corner sat my gentle, faithful wife, who lies with Ally on the other side of that window. Gone, all gone, and the last and least worthy of them all has lingered on twenty years alone, alone. May we soon be one family again, mingling voices in a better church, a better world."

He wanders down the aisles again, looks in at the vestry, lingering at the doorway, reads and re-reads the marble slab which records his family losses, and that other one, the cenotaph which brother-officers erected here in memoriam of the worth and valour of him whose bones mingle with the orient soil of a red, red field. He sighs as he turns away with very solemn face and mien, wanders up and down the aisles once again, lingers looking at the east window, while the sounds of his steps echo and die away, then goes to the little postern door. There he stands some minutes in deep reverie or in long, loving observation, then passes out, closing the door, the reverberations of which

are heard inside like the plaining questions of unquiet ghosts.

A few steps, and he is beside a tomb and a family grave, his eye dimming, his lips quivering, a heavy breathing, stertorous in the fluttering nostrils, a choking, unaccustomed something filling his throat. With a shrinking lest anyone may have seen him, with his heart still clinging to the scene, he turns, and, slowly gathering up his implements, wends his way with bent head on this autumn morn. Has anything unusual been occupying his thoughts, solemnising his mind? Let us go into Mr. Fossett's house, into his study. It is not the "den" of a great litterateur, or of a great, scholarly man, laden with piles of forgotten books, or priceless manuscripts, or unique editions of world-famed works. There are plenty of books, once resplendent in gilded leather, and now, like many a former beauty, toned down into dimness and the twilight of their former selves. That fine edition of Valpy's old classics was a college prize fifty years ago. That grand set of folios, old Saville's St. Chrysostom, was bought and partially read in the curly

days of his curating. And those different editions of the New Testament in Greek, and of St. Augustine, Cyril, Origen, Tertullian, and Theophylact, &c., were all bought lang syne, when he had thoughts of his office, which the new lights, with their shallow catchwords and sanctimonious jargon, would have declared as utterly disproved by that gun in the corner, that fishing-rod which must be somewhere at present by the sparkling waters, those bounding pointers which are peradventure now frolicking over the meads and returning to gaze, with almost human love and womanly faithfulness, into his face.

Yes, the fishing-rod is on its mission, and that is why we can play the spy at our leisure in the dear old man's sanctum. There is a letter laid open on that blotted, dull green baize writing-desk, and the ink is scarcely dry.

“Whisselton Rectory, Sept. 28, 1848.

“DEAR SIR,

“It is so long since you have seen the writer of this, or heard of him, I believe, that you may have considerable difficulty

in recalling him to mind. Nor would I tyrannise over your attention so far as to recall myself to your recollection, were it not that there are grave matters demanding consideration, and which, I believe, you ought at least to know. I am an old man now; I cannot, in the course of nature, expect to live long, and I have had my premonitory warnings, telling me to set my house in order. This, of course, is not a matter to trouble you with, nor would you have heard it if something had not occurred which brings in your own family concerns. To be brief, then, I must refer to your elder brother, and you must forgive me if I recall painful experiences of your own in connection with him. You know I loved him very much when he was my pupil preparing here for Oxford. His fine, dashing manner, his open, manly countenance, his free-handed generosity, his liberal sentiments, his great abilities, nay, even his proud, wayward temper, had all a fascination for me, and I loved him with the love of a father. I was pleased to see him take out into the fields my young boy when he went coursing, or fishing, or seeking an otter. You know, alas! too



well how he fell into temptation at Oxford, neglected his reading, gambled, frequented the turf, and became the victim of male and female harpies, until his little fortune was almost entirely gone. But you may not know that, when he left England a dying man, as it has since turned out, he sent me a letter, and with it two children, begging me to take charge of them as his. Gauging my fatherly heart, he said, by his own, he knew that I would not refuse to shelter them for a few months, inasmuch as all my own children had passed away. I felt the compliment. I felt also the responsibility; but I must confess I felt also some little pique when he furnished me with no information whatever as to their mother. Were they born in wedlock? Is their mother living or dead? Why did he not send them to his relatives—yourself or his married sister?

“These and many other questions at once suggested themselves, and I must say that they would not have entered my house as residents had it not been that he sent them and his request, together with the intimation that he was already on his travels, and that he confided

them entirely to my care, because he knew no one else to whom he could entrust them, and that I should suffer no loss. I could not shut my door against them. I received them with the letter their nurse brought—two interesting creatures, the boy the very image of his father, the girl the child of a beautiful woman, I doubt not, if that woman were anything like her offspring. I gave them a home, and they remained with me for many months, endearing themselves very much to my heart. Afterwards, for reasons which I can explain to you when we meet—and I feel I ought to speak with you before I die—I sent them into the Yorkshire dales under the charge of a very old servant, who had taken a wonderful liking to them. While they were away, a person unknown altogether to me, of the name of Mumford, called and showed me a letter, in your brother's handwriting, naming him as co-guardian with myself. He said that your brother died under his care out in Australia. He was very mysterious about poor James's concerns, although at the time he affected the greatest candour. He pleaded ignorance of

your brother's affairs, could not say whether on realisation there would be anything for the children or not, and seemed extremely solicitous to relieve me of the charge of them, wishing, he said, to bear the burden of their maintenance and education out of his own purse as a mark of affectionate regard towards your late brother's memory. I must confess that I felt a secret repugnance to this man; but as co-guardian, and especially as he appeared to waive handsomely his own wishes in deference to my mine, I gave him their address. Some little time after *they were both kidnapped*. There may be no connection betwixt his desire to have them and this crime, but I must confess to many misgivings, especially as I have reason to suspect that two scraps of notes, lost where the man struggled with the nurse when he stole them, bear initials that answer to his name.

"The poor woman who had charge of them sought everywhere in vain, and returned, after ten weeks of hunting, to recruit her strength. These two notes just found have sent her off again on the search, and not altogether in vain. But herein lies my reason for addressing you.

I may not live to protect them, or even to hear of the recovery of the girl, and I want you to take my place as their guardian, for they will need one. I cannot say who they are. I only know your brother committed them solemnly to me as his own. I cannot assert that there is a penny left to them; indeed, I fear that there is not; but, assuming their legitimacy, I should like to provide for the girl, educate the boy, and make him my heir. I am in great perplexity about the bearings of the whole case, and would have waited upon you this week to consult upon it, had I felt sufficiently strong. Will you indulge an old man so far as to meet me at Hexham at an early date, or come up here and take a bed with us at the rectory? Do if you can.

“Yours faithfully,

“GILBERT FOSSETT.

“To Sylvester Chapman, Esq.”

We fold the letter up thoughtfully, leaving it just as we found it, ready for the sealing-wax prior to the post. We observe another, which

has been lying there four hours since the letter-carrier delivered it. It is in a very different handwriting, less of the clean, crisp, round Greek characterisation of the educated cleric, and more of the cramped style of one unused to the pen. It has, besides, the marks of one writing either in great haste or under agitated feelings.

“ Crabley, Sept. 26, 1848.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I have come to the quietest place I could think of, and to an old fellow-servant's house, which got married. I am sorry to say that I could only recover one of the children, but they say they'll try to get me the girl, and keep her safe until they can hear from me ; but I feel as I don't believe as they will. Poor little Florrie ! my heart bleeds when I think of her being among them roughians and that dreadful woman. I want to talk to you, sir, very much about the boy, which is recovering some of his good looks. And, my duty to you, sir, I should be obliged to you if you would tell me who his friends are, as you said you would,

and as I've long wished to know. Not but what I shall love him and find for him, if nobody claims him. But those as belong to them ought to know how the childer is going on, yet I scarcely feel as if I can give little Strange up. I'd work my fingers to the bone, if it's all the same to you, sir, to keep him, and I hope they won't take him from me, when you tell me all about his father and mother as is away foreign. Besides, if they should die in them places, and my late travels has shown me what accidents may happen, I ought to be able to tell him all about himself when he gets older. I am very tired with travelling; but I hope this will find you well, as it leaves me at present—thank God for it. So no more from

“Your dutiful servant,

“REBEKAH BOSTOCK.

“P.S.—Do come soon, for you know I cannot come to Whisselton. Also his trousers is out, and his clothes was lost, and all my money is done.”

We sit down to ponder on these two letters, but a shrill voice interrupts.

"I say, master's very late, and there's old Jinny to be buried, and Mrs. Smart to be churched."

"He'll come, niver fear," returns a gruffish voice, ceasing that professional whiss-ss-ss-s-s peculiar to the groom when rubbing down a horse.

"I say," we hear in a while, after again perusing the epistles.

"Well, well, what (whiss) is it noo?" (whiss.)

"They're coming down t' hill, Jinny's funeral is. Go and find master at once."

"Oh! dear me. All t' wimmin are alike (whiss). They're allus in a fuss (whiss. Whoi, be still, Fanny.) Niver still a minit. I'll be bund (whiss) t' mayster's i' t' church (whiss) putting on his surplice, wi' his rod and net leaning agin t' vestry doer cheek (whiss. Be quiet, Fanny,"—*sotto voce*. "She's as skittish as all t' she tribe.")

"I doubt it," retorts the housekeeper, shaking her head.

"But I dunnot," replies the old man, leading Fanny, afrisk with corn, into her box.

He comes out with an air of manly but

offended importance, thrusts his hands into his pockets, and loiters vestrywards, in a philosophic spirit, to prove his case. The funeral is getting to the lych-gate on one side of the church, when the groom approaches the vestry-door on the other. No rod nor long-handled net uprear against the wall. A locked door, a silent room.

"By gum, this *is* aukerd," he is saying to himself, when the sexton comes round to him.

"Hoo, noo?"

"Nay, I knaw nowt about it. T' maister must ha' fergitten."

"Nay, he niver fergits."

"Happen someb'dy's takken badly i' t' road here, an' kept him."

"Happen soo."

The bearers are standing reverently with their burden by the lych-gate, wondering how it is that the solemn voice, "I am the resurrection and the life," is not devoutly floating the words from the coffin to the upper airs as it has done since most of them were children.

Murmurs are heard. The men grow restive under their burden, and set down the bier



gently under the little roof. There is whispered comment, words that show a sense of slight, and offended pride.

"Nay, nay, Ailie," says an old man on a crutch, a kind of labourer, "I've known Mr. Fossett near fifty year, an' this niver happened afore. There's summat wrang, lass, summat wrang. He's nut t' man t' hurt poor fowk's feelin's. We munna be unjust. We were all that a year er twea back."

Ailie subsides into silence.

They wait a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, half an hour! Mrs. Smart has come up to the lych-gate, grandly dressed, quite overwhelming in her silk-velvet mantle, and throned in their own spruce gig; come under the impression that the funeral party must have gone homewards ere now. The sexton tells her she will have to wait. "'First come, first sarv-ed,' yer knaw, Mrs. Smart," he says, when nothing a look of disdain arise at having to wait for these poor people. "Actilly t' lowest o' t' low," as she mutters, poutingly, to her husband.

Three quarters of an hour!

The funeral party is no longer a well-ordered

tail; it is a round, angry group, with a gig behind, and a coffin before it.

"Weel, weel, ah canna do ony bether for ye. Summat's happened, that's what it is. An' when did onybody wait here afore? that's what ah want to knaw," continues the sexton, with indignation in his voice.

There is silence, but discontent.

"There's nowt for 't, ah tell ye, if t' coffin isn't to stay all neet i' t' church, but sending for t' new clergyman, him as comed i' Mr. Knowles's place, efter he gat what he called his call into anuther part o' t' vineyard. Mrs. Smart, ye'd bether put up for a bit at t' 'Rid Lion,'" the sexton says, respectfully, to the more august party after soothing the labourers, "till I send for him that's followed Mr. Knowles ye kenned well."

Mrs. Smart seems less soothed than before. No, she's not going to be churched by somebody n' better'n a kewritt. Mr. Fossett shall do it; ay, and she'll make him do it at *her* time too.

"Ye munna be angry, Mrs. Smart. Accidents will happen, an' ah niver knawed this afore o' Mr. Fossett."

Mrs. Smart intimates "t' bishop shall know it, if she lives another day," and commands her husband to drive home to the Manor Farm. The poor man mildly beseeches her not to make a fool of herself, but does as she bids him nevertheless.

The new clergyman is easily found, and willingly helps, but the poor sorrowing folk go back to arvel and cakes with less of appetite because the old rector has not officiated at the last offices of the dead.

An hour afterwards, the groom says to the housekeeper, bodingly,

"Dear me, how lang t' maister is."

"Oh! you are anxious at last. You men are all such dull, stupid things. I was just putting on my things to go and seek him, as them that's eaten his bread didn't think it worth their while."

The old man grows fidgety, and goes to seek his friend the sexton, just then putting the last touches on old Jinny's grave. They agree to follow up the stream until they meet him. On they go without seeing him until they get to the Upper Ghyll. Ah! there are traces at last.

His rod is fixed in the ground by the spear end. It is leaning over the stream, the top bent bow-like, and the line tight and moving about.

"There's a fish on 't, by George!"

The two men are moved like school-boys, and run to see "the bite." They pause suddenly, without attempting to land the spotted prey, and look furtively around, for Mr. Fossett's hat is laid at the foot of his fishing-rod. No, they cannot see him.

"Happen he's gone up t' Ghyll a bit."

They start forwards, but only go a few yards. Rounding a little shoulder of the Ghyll they stop, and are silent. Mr. Fossett is sitting on a stone, leaning against the bank. There is a great peace on his face, a great rest, and his two faithful dogs are laid at his feet, looking wistfully into that countenance they love. One of them sets up a plaintive whine, and comes crouchingly up to the men.

"Why, he's fallen asleep!" whispers the sexton.

He has ; into the longest sleep of all.

Another six days and that little knot of mourners who had accompanied poor old Jinny's

remains to the "narrow house and dark" are standing again at that lych-gate with many, many more—standing in deeper grief than before—around another coffin; waiting until the tremulous tones of a very old man, a college friend in far-off years of him who is gone, shall lead them into church, lead them in sorrow while uttering that great voice of gladness: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Shall we linger around that grave when the sprigs of rosemary and the flowers cut from cottage window plants, or plucked from homely gardens, have dropped deep down with honest tears in their wake, and the old priestly companion has closed the book and gone sadly away? It is but to listen to those few old peasants, whose thin, white locks wanton in the gentle wind as they talk with hat in hand.

They tell how it is fifty years almost since he came among them in their youth or in their early manhood and womanhood, and all that were up-grown save themselves are now at rest be-

neath the heavy turf around. Names are mentioned, words remembered, which those said to him, or he to them—these brethren again of the same silent kingdom around.

There is sorrowful pride, sedate pleasure in the welling up of these fountains of reminiscence, while they watch the last rounding sods laid reverently on the new mound at their feet.

“Ay, ay, he was one o’ t’ auld sort, he was, an’ t’ last of his name; good folks all of ’em, as mony laid about here could tell, if they might. A bit odd he was, a bit stiff, but varra kind, an’ varra just. We cannot be lang efter him, an’ may we all pass away as quietly when our time comes.”

Amongst those present at the funeral were two gentlemen, Mr. Fossett’s trustee and Mr. Sylvester Chapman, a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, with an air of the county squire and travelled man added to a something which implies the dilletante agriculturist.

They are seated in the old rector’s study.

“That letter in your hand, found upon this desk, Mr. Chapman, will explain why I wanted you here.”

"Yes, Mr. Blyth, but I scarcely see what I have to do with the case."

"They are your brother's children, and they were sent by him to Mr. Fossett."

"Ah! but my brother did not recognise me in the case at all."

"I confess I neither understand his motives nor his actions, but, I submit, you are their natural guardian under the circumstances."

"I don't know about that. Who are these children? Where is their mother? They may be a couple of byblows for anything I know."

"I cannot answer those questions. I only know that by this letter, found amongst Mr. Fossett's papers, he acknowledged them as his."

Mr. Sylvester takes the offered letter, and reads it.

"I see it says nothing more than Mr. Fossett's letter intimates. Nothing whatever is said of the mother or her family. There is no doubt that my brother wrote this letter. But, Mr. Blyth, if you had known him, you would rather have inferred from his life, as well as his

letter, that there was something irregular about this matter. And, I must confess, I cannot enter heartily into it without more information about his marriage, if marriage at all there was."

"It is hard to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, on the one side, and, on the other, it is really little that I wish you to do beyond asserting your legal position as their 'next friend.' If anything has been left to them, you will have to vindicate their rights; if not, they will not remain unprovided for."

"Pardon me, Mr. Blyth," he answers, proudly, "the Chapmans have never yet left any of their blood to starve. What I want to know is, who are those children, and where are they? Vindicating their rights, as you call it, may be attacking the rights of my sister's children."

"I fear I can give but a lame answer to your questions. Who they are, you know as well as I do. Where they are can only be answered in part. We have got one of them; the other that was kidnapped is still untraced."

"Oh! indeed. Where is the interesting salvage? I mean the one recovered from those



people who have such a mysterious desire to pay for the board and lodging of two poor children."

"He is safe, and we will talk of that view of the case presently. But I hope you don't refuse us your name in dealing with the solemn rights of these children."

"My dear sir, you are begging the whole question. Have they any legal right at all, is the point we have got to settle, and I see no evidence of it of any kind whatever. I never heard of my brother's marriage, nor did any member of my family. The whole case, like that of his death, came upon us as a surprise. Indeed, I could not swear in a Court of Justice that he is dead, although I believe it."

"Well, well, but one of the children is with us. There is a mysterious interest about them in some quarter or other. They have been kidnapped. One, the boy, has been recovered, and the woman in charge of the girl has decamped. All these things show us that there is something to explain, to say the least of it. There is a mysterious personage, too, looming in the case. You have got his name in Mr.

Fossett's letter, a man named Mumford."

"Mumford, Mumford," echoes Mr. Chapman, wonderingly, as he gazes deep into the fire. "Who is this Mumford?" he asks, looking up with quiet, subtle interest.

"I really don't know. Nor do I know where his residence is. All communications come from a London firm of solicitors, who refuse his address."

"Mumford, Mumford. What is it I know about that name? It can't be that old miserly squireen. No, that's not it."

"John Dacre Mumford is the full name."

"John Dacre! Ah! my poor brother's greatest curse!"

He speaks with a kindling vehemence, which contrasts strangely with his usual *laissez faire* manner.

"I see old Mumford is dead, and this man has taken his name for what he might get."

"And he's really in this business?"

"He is, Mr. Chapman. But how far, I cannot say."

"Then I will cross his purpose. Mr. Blyth, I will be the guardian of this boy along with

yourself, and you must contrive to let me see him soon."

"Agreed," he exclaims, pleasantly disappointed at the signs of human interest.

They talk on now confidentially in a low tone, and papers are freely referred to. At last Mr. Blyth is heard saying,

"Then you agree that the boy shall be dealt with in the manner these memoranda, found in his desk, show Mr. Fossett intended?"

"Yes. Let him, in a while, go to Mr. Singleton, a genial-hearted clergyman, as you say, of the old-fashioned school, as Mr. Fossett's notes propose. He can board and lodge with him, and I will contrive every now and then to see him casually, and without his knowing who I am."

"Well, and what shall we do with respect to the old housekeeper, Mrs. Bostock?"

"Clearly we cannot tell her who this boy is, for we only imperfectly know ourselves, and it will produce ineffable mischief on the boy's mind if he is brought up with the idea that he is some grandee defrauded of his just rights.

I've seen one such case end in misery and ruin. Let her understand that the boy has no expectations but in his own efforts, and must be so brought up that his parentage is practically unknown. He may stay with her until he is old enough to go to Mr. Singleton, when she perhaps may obtain another situation. If the girl should be recovered, why, let her be treated like the boy; and if he should show any aptitude for learning, why, as you say there are funds available for sending him up to the university, let him go there. I think this is legislating for his future quite far enough."

"I agree with you, Mr. Chapman. As you wish it, I will see all this carried out and write to you in due course."

"Good day."

"Good day."

The two gentlemen shake hands, and separate like men who have discovered that they can work together.

That evening, he is alone in his private room, and the face of Mr. Sylvester has lost the little *dolce far niente* look which has been man-

ting there for some years; there is anger, perturbation, as he walks up and down the apartment; haughtiness, offended rectitude in that changing cheek and stiffening figure.

“So you are stirring mud at the bottom of this pool, Mr. Mumford. It is like you, and the pity is that James could never see you as you are. But, beware! beware! You might prevent my brother sending me a last message; you might cozen me out of my affianced bride; but you will not do what you like with these children. Poor little Nellie! You will know nothing of what is being plotted. He will never tell you, because he knows that he will have a foe in the business that will bring it to nought. But at least I know that you will wish justice to be done, and, if my brother made a will or left anything, it shall be looked to. Yes, I vow that to-morrow I’ll begin at Doctors’ Commons and read the will, and, as nearest of kin, enforce its provisions. Poor Nellie! poor Nellie! I might have once said poor Sylvester, but I need no commiseration compared with you.”

He was as good as his word. To his sur-

prise, he learnt that no will of such a person as James Chapman had been proved by such a person as John Dacre Mumford or anyone else, either at Doctors' Commons, Chester, or York.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## PERPLEXITIES.

A BOX of papers had found their way from the late Mr. Chapman's London solicitors to Dewsey Manor, and had furnished Mr. Mumford with much interesting and private reading in what he called his factotum-room. He had learnt many things therefrom, palatable and otherwise, and he had earned his learning by the devoted manner in which he had diligently perused all the deeds and documents. Mr. Mumford, as we have seen before, believed that knowledge was power, and power success, the one great sauce of existence. He had had several hauls at these family archives, and considered that he had pretty well sucked all the marrow out of them; but, as he was putting them back for the last time into the box, his attention was at-

tracted by a sheet of memoranda hitherto little heeded; he picked it up, and saw at once that it was in the neat, small, precise handwriting of his late friend. He read it carefully, and discovered that it contained instructions to his lawyers about his will to be executed in duplicate. "In Duplicate!" he exclaimed to himself. "Did they do it? I must write to them at once." On second thoughts he decided not, and set to work forthwith to elucidate the matter. Old bills were diligently perused which had been glanced at only as such—we generally throw them aside, if duly discharged, with something of the air and feeling of a man kicking out of his way the body of a whip snake, killed in its attempt to sting him—and the scrutiny showed him that Mr. Chapman had been charged for a deed of gift, executed in duplicate—an after-thought as to the mode in carrying out his purpose. The solid earth seemed for a moment as if it were breaking under this man's feet. Great beads of perspiration gathered on his brow as it heated, and his countenance flushed and dimmed under the vexing discovery. Knowledge was unhappiness



for some painful moments to him, and reflection did not clear the glooming sky.

Where could that copy of the deed of gift be? Was it in some one's hands in England? Had that stern old parson, whom he called a frump no longer now, got it? Was he biding his time to turn him out of Dewsy Manor? Would there be an exact scrutiny of those stocks and shares which he had been realizing lately, and re-investing in another name? Evidently he must make his line of retreat clear in presence of this unexpected peril confronting him on his flank. He walked up and down that chamber a weary half-hour, with the question, "Where is it?" struggling within him like a wild animal tied up in a bag. At length an idea occurred to him, and at once, according to his wont, he acted upon it. Going to the door he softly summoned Biddy.

"Biddy, where are those papers you found in the room when Mr. Chapman died?"

A glimmer of uncertainty wavered in Biddy's eyes, but she soon recovered.

"The p'haypers, surr? Shure, now, yer honour niver towld me to look for any p'haypers."

"No, but you might have found some, you know, Biddy, and I want to know where you put them."

Biddy stoutly denied finding *any* papers in the room.

"She knows," said Mr. Mumford, with a sort of relief to himself. "I saw it in her eyes."

"Shure, I niver found 'em in the room at all at all. They were unther his head, poor gintleman," said Biddy, in her heart, lulling her conscience.

That afternoon a bottle of strong whisky was found standing on a table in the day nursery, with a glass beside it, as if some one had been lately taking a little. Biddy felt, after bringing in the children from their walk, that she was tired, and that it had a most enchanting smell. She said to herself that she was on the point of fainting, and that it smelt dacent. Surely the taste was as dacent as the smell, and the second taste better than the first! So it happened, when Mr. Mumford sauntered accidentally into the room seeking something, that Biddy was in a very sublime and talkative condition, with all her natural dislike of her

master softened down to a marvellous degree. He easily wheedled it out of her, but the new knowledge was scarcely power, and anything but comfort.

"I must see that woman. She's got an awful power over me now, if she only knows it. A few more bank-notes, if she has gone on right with those children, and a threat, if she has not, to lay that written undertaking of hers to treat them well before the magistrates, may bring her to her senses. Fool that I was to send those old clothes and stuff to her! But I couldn't bear them in the house. Why didn't I burn them, sell them, drop them into the sea, or do anything rather than what I did?"

Next day towards dusk a gentleman might have been seen in Angel Street loitering carelessly down it as if the place had no particular interest for him. But he started when he observed a house, superior in its style and size to those around, shut up, wearing that forlorn appearance peculiar to empty houses when the small boys have had a good time of it in stoning the windows into many punctured patterns. Dirt, neglect, squalor, dilapidation, were written

upon it from doorstep to garret-window. Even the brass knocker, that shiny emblem of the late tenant's respectability, had been wrenched off and turned, hard as it was, by the conjuring of a marine store-dealer into flowing whisky. If the gentleman had had an inclination for investigation, he might have got the key, gone inside, and discovered that every lead pipe and tap had been transmuted in the same wonderful manner into strong waters.

His involuntary, startled look had not escaped the attention of two gentlemen near, who had a professional interest in his pocket, intensified by the fact that he was not of a size and build to render it safe to make an assault prior to a scientific investigation of his personal property. They were near to him when his eye fell upon them.

"Who was it that lived here?"

"Auld Mother Scaife. Yo knaw that weel, maister, yersel."

This was embarrassing, but had points of hope about it.

"Ah! yes, I remember having once to call here. Where has she gone?"

Nobody knew, they said. If he'd stand a drink, they'd tell him summat.

Half a crown glittered at once in his hand, to buy the knowledge which was power. They told him that she had grown very proud, very fine, turning up her nose at everybody ever since two children came to her one night, and that the boy had been stolen, and then Mrs. Scaife had sent the girl away, sold all her furniture, and entirely disappeared.

"Had they no idea where she was?"

No. Iverybody wanted to know that.

"Did they know what had got the boy?"

Nob'dy could tell reetly, but it might be fund out if brass enough were forthcoming.

The gentleman parted with his half-crown, and the pair passed on to the "Packer's Arms," overcome with thirst after so much talk.

"If she has lost that boy," he reflected, "this circumstance has drawn her fangs. The deeds are of little use to her, because the girl only gets her allowance out of the property through him. He must be forthcoming ere she can live out of the estate through this girl, always supposing the child lives to become twenty-one.

But whose interest was it to regain the young folks?"

His countenance grew very dark as he discussed this thought in all its bearings. Clearly he had some powerful enemy who was watching over these children. Probably enough Mrs. Scaife, having got everything she could out of him, had sold herself to that enemy, and taken him the deed of gift, and goodness knows what other papers besides, for Biddy admitted that it was a largish packet. Likely enough the loss of the child was a mere ruse ; in fact, a mere lie with a circumstance, and without any loss of him at all, to palm off on one or two of her intimates as an excuse for leaving the neighbourhood so suddenly. Nevertheless, it was clear that he must find her, and ascertain how the land lay. The recovery of the boy was a secondary matter to this. Still, after endeavouring carefully to get information through a local private detective in vain about her, it struck him that, possibly enough, Mr. De Burgh, *alias* John Smith, might help him. If the person who had regained the child were the same as the one from whom it was stolen, Smith would

know much of her personal appearance and other matters, which would help in tracing it out. And, if the boy were found in the hands of an agent of that old parson's, depend upon it Mrs. Scaife might be found upon a near trail, and he might recover them all in a bunch.

But the wily man groaned at heart as he thus reasoned, walking restlessly up and down his room. Avenues of unfavourable possibilities opened up to his mental outlook. Probabilities against him, chances of detection, mischances, he called them, seemed to lurk on every side along the road he purposed travelling. A settled conviction for the first time came over him that he must be ruthless now in sweeping away every obstacle from his path, otherwise he should be utterly undone. He must spend and be spent in staving off this new danger, and succeed he would whatever he did. But, oh! what a dreary outlook lay before him. It must prove perilous getting this agent or that to commit a crime when it was wanted. Some of them would be sure to "round" on him, if he did not keep well in the background, and how he could do that always he did not clearly see.

Smith, he believed, was a criminal ; most likely of the finessing type ; but he could not as yet prove it. If he could, he should get him into his power, and do everything through him. Pay on the one side and threats on the other might make snaffle and curb with two good reins attached whereby to drive and turn him whithersoever he would. He must go up to London to-day, and send Smith down at once on this quest after the boy and Mrs. Scaife ; and, in the meantime, he might get information from some of his late brothers colonial there, who had come home as the papers testified by recent mails.

He found Mr. Smith in a seedy condition, and very willing to undertake the mission. The private inquiry business was scarcely a success. Smith despatched, Mr. Mumford sought out a Melbourne friend or two, and was gratified to find that such a person as he described was really wanted for a course of petty forgeries, which had been found out before they could bring in much pecuniary spoil. One of them was amused at Mr. Mumford's earnestness in the inquiry, but he told him, nevertheless, all that



he remembered about the gentleman's personal appearance, his antecedents, and performances. He was an Oxford man, he remarked, once in the army, next a sharper, then a store clerk, and at last a forger.

"The thing's certain. He'll find it hot, if he goes back to Melbourne," continued the old colonial.

"And another thing's certain," said Mr. Mumford to himself, "he'll find it hot without going back, if he doesn't do what I want?"

Mr. Smith detected nothing. He discovered enough to show him that Rebekah had got the boy, he did not doubt that Mrs. Scaife had the girl, but where either was he remained absolutely unable to divine. Mr. Mumford sneered at poor Smith's imbecility in a bitter way, but he could give no hint that would assist his agent.

He returned after a somewhat lengthened absence to Dewsy Manor in a gloomy, discontented vein. For days and weeks he scarcely seemed to be able to come sufficiently out of himself to be barely sociable at table, and, when not there, was moodily pacing his fields, or shutting himself up in his room. Nor was this his only

vexation. Letters were awaiting him on his return home which led him to expect a fraud upon him in the letting and sale of his Mooranga sheep run and cattle farm.

"The guarantors and the buyer are ruined men now, and I fear the latter is very shaky in more senses than one," so said his correspondent.

There were times when a dark, vengeful look was in his eye, but generally his demeanour was that of absorbed depression.

Nor was he the only disquieted person in the house. His wife naturally desired to know why this gloom and moodiness. But she wanted to know something more. She was wishful to ascertain the condition and whereabouts of Mr. Chapman's children. The brave little woman felt that there was something wrong, but what she could not tell, and the thought hung about her like a threat of coming neuralgia, giving a chalkier pallor to the pale, thoughtful brow, and the thin, transparent cheek. She could only bide her time, and once again, after weeks of dejection, she chose a moment when, in the evening firelight, he seemed to have grown more cheerful, more like his former self.

But such an explosion of wrath met her gentle inquiry, followed by such a bang of the door as he left the room, that she almost fainted with terror. Still she did not feel subdued into silence, and returned to the charge afterwards when an opportunity seemed to present itself. But this time he treated her differently. He bade her remember how troubled he had been for several weeks, and all on account of those two children. The fact was, he said, he had put them under the care of a suitable person, and she had somehow mysteriously disappeared. Why, or wherefore, he could not tell, but he had employed detectives in search of them, yet hitherto without avail. When they were found he would inform her, but the subject was so painful to him that he begged she would not mention it again until he should broach it himself. And the little woman, with the sense of a great wrong, with the intuition that they were standing on the borderland of crime, but ignorant what that crime might be, kept all these things in her heart, yet drooped and grew languid at times with the secret load.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## OLD SINS AND NEW.

NEAR to Dewsey Manor is the well-known common called Wortle Long Green—really a green, and certainly very long. It is a drive of a full mile from entering to quitting that long stretch of bright, mossy grass, tall reeds, oblongs and rounds of little mere lying in the many hollows, whitherabouts the swan-white geese flock in store. Here and there are clumps of bossy alders bursting into myriads of withes. Here and there are flocks of sheep scattering for the short, sweet herbage; up and down stalks chanticleer, with his female following, or golden-green headed drake, circled by his harem; here and there a man or woman is crossing the green, a maiden sauntering with a child, or troops of naughty boys frolicking

from school and running to congenial mischief. The roads across the common are pebbled with nodules of flint, fantastically rounded, glistening white without and black-blue within.

It is a glorious common, with its neat, straw-thatched cottages around it at intervals, rich in the wealth of their gardens and a sylvan peace. How charming on this summer afternoon, in the clear air, athwart that Italian sky, to watch those little, steely viens of smoke worming upwards to the azure bend. Outside the waste at intervals are holdings, and one or two of them, by their little camps of corn-stacks, indicate substantial comfort. On the central common, near the main road, is a clump of trees embosoming a forge and a cart manufactory, where objects new and subjects old are seen in all stages of perfection, breakage, or repair. At the upper end of the green, where it grows wide and circular, a sweep of cottages curves ahead, with school premises in the centre, having an ambitious gateway, dedicated in large letters to "Faith, Hope, and Charity." Hereabouts the roads break off in many directions. It is a pleasant scene in this mid-after-

noon of the hot, hay-scented July day; the peace and quiet felt palpably above the distant shouts of children, and the cries of woolly and feathered flocks. The lungs acknowledge here a stirring, life-giving air different from that of the close, narrow lands, made almost stuffy with the wealth of hazel and thorn vegetation rising high over head. Surely as one breathes this nectar, with such a cool thrill about it, like champagne fresh from a deep cellar; as one looks at that soft, rounding landscape, enriched with church and hall, globing pollard oak, and spiry beech and poplar, severed by breadths of golden corn, or verdant fields of turnip and root crops, surely one may rejoice here in the cool of this July afternoon.

A lady enters the green, riding in a little basket-chaise drawn by one of those strong, beautiful, tawny creamy cobs of the pure Suffolk breed. Two little girls are with her, who are old enough to be very patronizing to "baby." The peasantry that meet her bow and curtsy with great deference, but the homage is relieved with pleasant looks of friendliness and love. A gleam of pleasure infills her counte-

nance as one or other passes, but it is immediately followed by a look of weariness and languor. One asks, why this vision of lassitude on that gentle, little woman's large, pale brow and thin, narrowing face?

Why do we see that meek eye dim so soon after lighting up with such a genuine ray of benevolence and tender interest?

Doubtless she has her troubles, some worm i' the bud that sucks of the very soul at its centre of being. Yet she has much to live for, and looks at what she has as well as what she has not, and this gives a secret strength to her life and regularity in the fulfilment of its calls. She is driving the children across the green for the benefit of its stimulating air on this day of languor elsewhere. She talks to Beaty and Millie; Baby crows; its mother thrills with pleasure, while the others ripple into laughter, driving along more merrily, the vital air getting into her veins. Why does she start as that man, dust-stained and limping, comes across the grass towards the chaise, the men in the blacksmith's shed pointing her out? When this dingy man turns to meet her on the way, why does

she shrink with a spasm of dislike? A much more graceful bow than such road-treaders generally give, a much more highly-polished, glistening smile. Why does she turn her head as if with revulsion, nodding coldly, and driving hotly on, this gentle woman who seems incapable of being harsh to any sentient thing?

"That evil little man De Burgh, whom I can't endure," the governess hears her say to herself.

"It's all very fine, Mrs. Mumford," mutters the man, as he looks after the chaise, "but I've found your trail and I'll keep it," and he turns and asks more questions of the two blacksmiths, who show fealty to the lady by answering drily and treating him as a suspicious character.

"Shall I turn round and drive past him home to tell Dacre?" she asks herself, as soon as a little calm is on the startled nerves.

No, she will not do that. Dacre either knows of this man's coming, or he does not; if he does, he has sent for him, and nothing that she can say will alter matters; if he does not, and the man is unwelcome, he will take stern account of this. She therefore continues her drive with but wan enjoyment.



Mr. Mumford is in a very moody humour in his factotum room. The haymakers and others have had his mind about their agricultural sins, a mind served up in vinegar. He is pondering the perpetual theme in worse than ordinary temper.

“Where is that boy, that packet, that woman?”

A tap at the door, and Biddy is saying, in a voice of secret malice,

“Yer honour’s wanted by a thramp.”

“You know I don’t see tramps, nurse.”

“It’s a gintleman thramp, sur-r, that knows yer honour, and says you know him.”

“I suppose you mean a pedestrian?”

“Yes, yer honour, a pesthrian thramp called De Burgh that was wid us in the *Marco Polo*. He says, the crayther, he’s turned into Smith, just as iggs turns into chickings, sur-r.”

“Send him here.”

“Ah! he’s found something out at last. But how has he found *this* out? That’s serious.”

Mr. Smith enters, and the first glance shows Mr. Mumford that the man knows nothing. If he had found out the secret there would have been importance in his bearing. Mr. Smith is

in distress, yet there is no supplicancy in his manner. He knows two great facts about Mr. Mumford now—those children and this home. He may find others out, and then the sinner is servant to him that farms the hidden sin. Ha! ha! ha!

“No letter has reached me, sir, through my solicitors that you were coming.” Mr. Mumford’s tone is curt. Mr. Smith’s self-ease is ebbing out. He explains that going elsewhere, on important inquiry business, he saw Mrs. Mumford, learnt the house was near, and thought a word with himself might be seasonable. He had heard that the boy was near Aysgarth, and Mrs. Scaife he believed could be found somewhere about Doncaster.

They have a long talk, and Mr. Smith is commissioned to make another search.

“He thinks that my secrets are passing into his hands,” says Mr. Mumford, internally, as he scans a little smirking smug expression on the Smithly face. “It’s time I let him learn something of what I know.”

“By the way, I’ve had a letter about you, Smith.”

"About me, Mr. Mumford? Dear me, who can it be?"

"Ah! the world takes an interest still in Albert Conway, late cashier to Reeves and Co., Melbourne."

Mr. Smith's crest lowers, but he stoutly asks what Albert Conway has to do with him?

"See, Smith, De Burgh, or what the doose you call yourself, look at this description. It's you to a T. Examine the handwriting to that cheque. It's like this signature to your last letter to me, and has an awkward dash of Mr. Reeves's fist about it too. I say, Conway, Smith, it was incantious of you to be found out."

Mr. Smith protests his innocence.

"Tell that to the marines, Smith. Would you object to my showing the officer, whom this Melbourne storekeeper has sent over, your letter, with a hint where you may be found? If you've no objection to proving your innocence, I'll——"

Mr. Smith sits as if his chair were a wasp's nest, his mouth opening, his eyes indicating the wits on swoon before this man's flinty face and curt, shrill alto-tones.

"Shall I tell the detective, Smith, where your collar can be touched when you're inside the coat?"

The little man wakes up to self-defence, denies that he is the man, or that there is any evidence against him.

"Smith," says his tormentor, meaningly, "there is much more evidence in this house of your doings. And Reeves has got a friend wanting you whom it's my interest to oblige. If you don't mind I'll put him on you."

No, he didn't mean that. He had, he knew, committed faults, not so bad as Mr. Mumford thought, but still faults.

"Crimes, Smith, crimes, man. But we won't quarrel about words. Tell me, am I to oblige my friend, or not?"

Mr. Smith would rather that he didn't move in the matter. Why should he? Hadn't he served Mr. Mumford with zeal and fidelity?

"I don't know about that. You've cost me a lot in trying to do what is still left undone. I sometimes think, Smith, that, while you've been taking my money, you've been in somebody else's pay."

"Now, by heavens, it's false! I——"

"False?" Mr. Mumford's voice is shrill to absolute pain. "False! and that to me! If you don't unsay that word, you infernal little forging and lying rascal, I'll throw you out of that window now."

The strong man has his hand on his collar.

"No, I didn't mean that. I meant that I didn't——"

"You did, sir. Haven't I got the papers there in that safe?"

Mr. Smith explains, palpitating visibly with fright, that he wasn't giving Mr. Mumford the lie. He was only protesting that he never was in anybody's pay. No, he never was. "S'help me——"

"Well, well," says Mr. Mumford, as if relenting. "If I could only rely upon you? It did vex me, Smith, to think that one I had taken such a fancy to should play me false, and one I can help and protect—protect, Smith, mind that—shouldn't be loyal to me and his bargain. If I could only rely upon you, Smith, what wouldn't I do!"

Mr. Mumford shakes his head reproachfully,

and speaks in a regretful, hurt tone. Mr. Smith protests that he does him injustice, and will serve him with all his soul.

"I don't know. I don't know."

Mr. Mumford is eyeing him as he speaks in this dubious mode.

Yes, he will do anything he can, only he mustn't set that kenfounded officer upon him.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Smith. It's necessary that you should be out of town just now, so don't return. Above all, don't mention my name in anything, and don't come here again. D'you agree?"

Mr. Smith does.

"Well, to business. You must find me that woman, Mrs. Scaife. And that boy, I must have him alive or dead. *Dead or alive*, Smith; d'you understand?"

Mr. Smith nods.

"Then you must find somebody that's not particular about trifles."

Mr. Smith thinks he can—nay, he's quite sure of it, and the bargain is struck.

"Expenses now. The reward when you succeed."

These are Mr. Mumford's last words.

"He won't give me much for fear I should bolt. I wish I could get hold of something to bring him into my power. I wish I could."

Such are Mr. Smith's reflections as he takes the back way from the house to avoid prying people.

Mr. Mumford stands long leaning against the mantel-piece, deep in thought.

"I wonder if I cowed him just enough. Anyway he must do this work. There'll be no peace until it's done."

The private inquiry man does not find it hard to approach Ann Gresley. She has been consoled by the friendship of Flash Charley, and the intimation that John Smith has something for this gentleman to do that will be well paid for, condones everything. Besides, Mrs. Bostock's parting insinuation has chilled the feelings of regret in Ann's breast, and she is quite disposed to give her aid. The result of this galaxy of talent working on the subject is that the game is run to earth.

One night Mrs. Bostock, in that homely,

comfortable cottage at Crabley, ensconced amid green fields, with a thick little orchard around it, and the roar of a great waterfall not far off, retires to rest. The boy, now eight years old, is sleeping quietly in his little, white-curtained cot, in a room contiguous. She fancies she hears a pane of glass break, then says to herself she must have been dreaming. In a while she hears a board creak—she knows the very board in the passage—as if a shoeless foot has trodden on it. She listens, gets silently up, and goes to the door. A current of cool air as from some open door or window. Who has been taken poorly? Some one groping upstairs in the dark. Swiftly but noiselessly she enters the boy's room. A man is striking a light. Instantly she dashes at him and seizes his hair. He kicks viciously at her shins with his shoeless feet, but she grapples him tight, pushes him before her, shocks him against the casement, and window and man go bodily out together. A man is heard running downstairs. Rebekah screams for assistance. When the household assemble in his bed-room, the boy is just awaking, quite unharmed.



"Make an effort, Charley. Come on, or we'll be nabbed."

The voice is urgent, and comes from fleeing men outside the orchard. Inside the house poor Rebekah is pressing the boy to her breast like something new found.

With his hand he rubs one eye; the other eye is closed. Anon the boy's head droops, falls on her bosom; a snore, and he is peacefully asleep again.

"Poor dear! he doesn't know what an escape he's had," she says to her hostess.

Outside lanterns are moving, and the husband comes in, saying he "reckons they've gotten clean off. But ye mun hev hurt him, Mrs. Bostock. Ye've knocked hafe et window out, an' theer's blood on t' brokken glass. See, I fund these below t' winder."

He shows a pair of clogs, dandy's clogs, with a multitude of brass eyelets, cleated and toe-plated; terrible weapons for kicking-matches.

She heeds them little, says she must be off before daybreak whither they will not find her, and requests them to get a trap ready at once.

This failure, clever as the tracking had been, was a great blow to Mr. Smith, and he felt that Mr. Mumford would be so exasperated with it that he might give the Australian officer a tip about him. Clearly his only chance was to mollify his master by finding out Mrs. Scaife. He worked with a will. The talent of Angel Street was in his pay, and in a little while he was able to write to his employer that the lady was living at 31, Hammond Street, Rotherford, and let lodgings there.

Mr. Mumford went down, but she stoutly denied that she had any documents. He offered a round bribe, but she was still cold and firm. The fact was she had argued herself into the belief that he had deprived her of the boy in order to get out of her power. His coming satisfied her that there was a screw loose, that the plot had not effected all he had intended, and that he was now harking back by attempting to regain the children. Therefore she would wait and see the result, satisfied that she stood to win more that way than by giving the documents up. The woman's teeth and lips set in sullen wise, and the great, round face grew

obstinate in expression as she pondered those things in her heart.

Mumford went back to London convinced that she had them. He took counsel with Smith. All the way up to town he was asking himself, "How far shall I trust this man?"

It seemed clear that, unless he was candid with the amateur detective, he could get nothing, inasmuch as the man would not know what to seek. It was equally clear, if he frankly told him all, that he should put himself in his power; and he had no relish for being as much in Smith's grip as he thought Smith was in his own. "What shall I do?" Ah! it was a hard question to answer, fraught with danger on every side. If he had only foreseen how many of these questions he would be called upon to resolve, he would have left this business untouched, and watched his flocks and herds still at Mooranga. But he must succeed, or all is lost; while success, now as ever, will cover a multitude of sins.

"What shall I do?" The question is pressing, and will not be toyed with. He hits at last upon a possible solution of the problem.

Biddy had described to him in her cups the exact size of the parcel, the colour of the paper, the black sealing-wax impressed with a crest—everything external. That crest was doubtless Mr. Chapman's, impressed by the very seal in his own possession now. He would show Smith the seal, tell him generally of the shape, size, and appearance of this parcel, leaving him to infer that John Dacre Mumford knew exactly what was within it, and only wanted it as a mere matter of form, although this latter was exigent. All this, some bullying about his failures, some promises if successful, might bring the packet into his hands. Then hail, all hail, peace and safety at last.

Mr. Mumford was very hard upon muddlers that managed nothing successfully for his money, when he met Smith in Norfolk Street: very severe, very frowning, and just holding slightly ajar a door to his good opinion, through which the delinquent might squeeze into safety again, free of all dread of that policeman with the warrant from Melbourne. The amateur groaned in spirit under his thralldom, but felt he must grin and bear it. He

received his instructions, given in a jaunty, inscrutable way, as from one who knew everything, and only needed these documents for purposes immaterial to his interests, but touching his pride and the fitness of things. But this time they must be obtained, otherwise—Mr. Mumford looked so much and said so little that Smith felt the gulf was actually opening for him, and brimstone burning at the bottom.

“It’s hard to bear, is all this,” said Smith to himself, as he went with a smiling face, worn awry inwardly, from the great man’s presence. “What did he mean by hinting that I must get it whatever I had to do at that woman? And the boy, dead or alive, must be produced. Humph! I must walk from the hulks, for my own advantage, towards a tow with a noose to it for his. A poor bargain! If I can only get at a secret of his, then look out, Nero.”

Some three weeks after this, a woman took lodgings at 31, Hammond Street, Rotherford, a rising town close to Whittlemore, the great centre, as all the world knows, of the razor trade. She was a quiet person, little, freckled, and snub-nosed, but very friendly, very in-

sinuating in her manners, withal. She had a small independency, she said, and that accounted for the fact that she did not serve in a shop, or get her living by dress-making, like other ladies who had lodged in the house. She stayed a month, and then disappeared. Now it chanced, after she had made a remarkably clear exit, that Mrs. Scaife went to a particular drawer to dream over the contents of a particular packet, as she loved to do in moments when she desired to drag the future into her hands, and brood over its honeyed vaticinations.

Why was she so startled? Why that angry cry? Why did she scatter and tumble contents of drawer and box everywhere, always coming back to look blankly into one corner of a cabinet, and to lapse into tiger rage, or rumination long, wrinkled and leaden in its atrabilious hue?

How different her mien to the smirk of satisfaction, the glint of mockery, the look of release in the eye of that little man who cons them over secretly in a room far away!

"The man that holds these is master," he says, quietly, to himself. "Yes, John Dacre Mumford, Esq., of Dewsey Manor. I know now

why you were so shy in letting your nest be known, that we could only get at you through your solicitors. You are having your pickings out of the little estate, and I'll have mine. And as for the *argumentum ad terrorem*, we'll meet it with another *enfant terrible* that is quite as grim to you, oh Nero. We'll have an *argumentum ad hominem*, with the Court of Chancery behind it. Yes, I'll make up a parcel which you shall pay dearly for, oh, churlish squatter, and I'll take care that the thing of things shall not be there, and, while you growl and pale, I'll fatten on your money, and have many a *postica sanna* at your expense, my lord."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A NEW HOME.

MRS. SCAIFE left Angel Street without beat of drum, or rather, without publishing her route. She left in an angry mood, darkened with the sense of defeat. Nevertheless, she was not subdued. She still held a fortress base of operations in that little packet. Those three bits of paper and sheepskin were to her as infantry, cavalry, artillery ; as guns, powder, shot and shell. She retired from the field with grievous loss, but still with every division of her army save one intact. The boy was gone ; the girl was still in hostage ; the documents in hand. Very angry was she ; somewhat stricken with a sense of helplessness at having to begin life afresh when its half-way house was passed, as all must be, especially women ; very resolute,



withal, to avenge what she now considered her wrongs. She chose Rotherford, for a mysterious reason. No friend lived there ; no special opening offered that she knew of for "bleeding with leeches," though, to be sure, everybody there, as everywhere else, had blood, good or bad, and some of it doubtless would be too hot and too rebellious for a moiety of them. Whittlemore was a larger town, offering greater scope to genius phlebotomic, and certainly more clients in that other branch of her profession, which was more lucrative, if needfully more secret. Why didn't she go, with truer insight into potentialities and possibilities, to Whittlemore instead of to Rotherford? We are all swayed by what appear trifles, or, at best, but caprices to others ; potent trifles they are, grasping with the strong grip of our secret loves or hates that weaker vessel, the reason, and veering, pushing, hustling it whither it says it is folly to go. What was it that thus handled the judgment of this self-contained, stern, tight-lipped woman, and sent her to Rotherford? Three children were in her house, but a girl, with the royal hair of the Æsir, and not of her own blood, was prime

in her regard, the first factor now in every calculation, in every bill of accommodation she drew mentally upon the days to come. That young girl's face and hair had strangely haunted her ever since she threw her first glance upon them. Who could she be? Whom did she suggest with her childish smiles, and every movement of eyebrow, cheek, and hand? No, it can't be she. The likeness must be accidental. But, lo! she had learned that the mother of that girl was the only female friend she ever cherished. That marriage certificate shows that St. Bride's, Hallamshire, witnessed the ceremony. Her memory tells her that at Rotherford, ten miles off, live poor Edith Snowden's relatives, who had quarrelled with her. Rotherford will serve as an asylum to her and hers, and there, with only one half of her old profession followed and the money she had, she might get a living, while she should probe this mystery to its very heart. There she pitched her tent, and there she prospered in her degree by such modes as she tried. She found the Snowdens distant, very upright and downright, very stiff. It was not easy to get speech with them. These

people, sellers of beef and mutton, would deal with her, but they wanted no words beyond. Cautiously she broached her former friendship with their sister Edith; as cautiously they shut up themselves like a sensitive plant, or drew in like a snail whose horns she had touched, and shortened speech with dry response. She decided to bide her time with these austere folks who had such a high sense of their own rectitude and all that was due to themselves and it.

“Your sister got married, I think?”

They would answer nothing, and only asked what meat she wanted to-day.

“Ah! never mind,” said Mrs. Scaife, in her inmost heart, “that girl gets more like her mother every hour. I’ll work through her.”

She felt she could bide her time. One aching void there was, the loss of that boy, which troubled her much, but she could get no light upon the transaction. Then occurred that theft which had ruined all the castles she had built in the future. The great anger came and went, and two things she did. She wrote out everything carefully with name and place appended that was

in those documents, wrote them while all was fresh in memory, and she cherished the child with a more jealous care than ever, keeping her constantly in sight. Ten years passed and then there came to Rotherford to occupy a small milk farm a family of the name of Smart. They had lived in Northumberland, and been very unfortunate in losing all their stock on the farm from a rinderpest of some sort or other.

"You're a Snowden," said Mrs. Scaife to Mrs. Smart, the first time she called for the milk account.

It was true.

"I knew your sister Edith."

Mrs. Smart's face dimmed, but not as inexorably as the faces of her kin.

"Edith was a good, pure girl when I knew her, and, I believe, ever remained such."

Mrs. Smart seemed to welcome the news, but in a silent, dubious way. A roughish, masterful sort of a woman, she was still and gentle on this theme, with a certain hesitancy of manner which she knew on no other.

Later, when she had called with another bill, on a fine summer day, Florrie came from

the fields into the room where she sat. The girl, impatient with the heat, tore off her snow-white hood, and let the Claude-tinted curls fall down like golden torques and films of rounding flame on her neck, framing the glowing face, as it were, with sunset cloud.

Mrs. Smart startled.

"Who is that?"

"Can you trace nobody in that girl?" said Mrs. Scaife, when Florrie had been sent upstairs.

"We'll talk about that another time," she replied, quickly, with the air of one disagreeably surprised. What her kinsfolk might have said, what pride of theirs might have been ruffled, or what pique or annoyance had become tangent to Mrs. Smart's mind, Mrs. Scaife could never tell; but she never called herself for the milk account again.

Florrie, meanwhile, was earning money as a pupil teacher.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## NIGHT-THOUGHTS.

“ I WONDER if he did. I gave him money to get him out of the country, whether he did or not. It was safer; but I never could believe that Smith gave me all the papers that Ann Gresley stole from Mrs. Scaife’s cabinet. I believe he’s kept one or two back. At least, he read them all through and made an abstract of them. And I doubt if he remained in the States, whither he went after getting a lot out me for his services and his expatriation, a little rogue. I shouldn’t be hearing what I am, if he’d been true and stayed quietly there.”

Backwards and forwards, with broken words, with heavy steps, often stopping to ponder on a shooting thought, or bear a spasm of self-crimination, this man ambles in his study. A

grizzled man, with a tossed, scraggy, grey beard, a neglected look about throat and poll, he is one that has a great burden on his mind, and the shadow of a greater coming which he forebodes. A tall man bowed, a strong man breaking, a resolute man sinking into weak, fevered obstinacy, a hopeful man settling into the lees of dismay and dread, a bold man become fearful, he is an object of either pity or contempt, or it may be both. His dejected look, his startled attention at sudden noise, his wandering eye, while the fixed thought seems to stereotype the brow into furrowed concern, all tell of wearing trouble fretting on a conquered nerve. At times the slow, weary pace quickens, at times a pause; the man unmoving, statuesque, idea struck, lost in a world of rumination—a tangle of plot or plan—which cheats the sense out of things present into an ideal realm of thorns. Then he will wake up with a deep, low sigh or groan; the uncertain step will patter over carpet pile again; the man will wear the hours away in cogitation that fathers no act as it was wont in younger and stronger days.

Perchance he will seek to end the quarrel twixt soul and self by finding the outer air. Often he has done this during these later years that have been glooming more and more. Over the roads, across the commons he has gone, under the moon, under the stars, or when neither deigned their light. Men have seen, women have seen a tall figure pass silently by in the lanes at dusk, bugging the great hazel hedges so close that they scarce knew who it was, and trembled with superstitious fears. Men crossing the Long Green have seen a dim outline of a man, away from the pebbled roads, gliding noiseless over the grass, and answering no greeting offered to propitiate the rising ghostly dread in their own breasts. Women have run palpitating away with smothered shriek, and have almost dropped with pallid terror when they regained their cottage doors, looking back with fearful, starting eyes. Whispers have gone abroad asking who is the night walker? Rumour has torn explanations from the spirit world, and said that it was some murderer's ghost walking where his gibbet chains once made iron music to the wintry



storm ; or some murdered tradesman slain for his little pack ; or some restless miser returned to seek the gold he hid in earth and never recovered ; some cavalier slain in rough old time, some woman wronged, and so forth. Tales have passed asserting that this being, fleshly or spiritual, was of enormous size ; heroic tales of certain persons daring to speak to it and getting no answer as it glid swiftly by ; improbable tales, bearing the lie on their very face, of Dick or Jim, notorious bouncers both, having told over their cups of going up to it and getting only a gruff response, or actually holding a conversation of two or three questions with it ere it sped out of sight.

But this stage of spiritual terror is over, and people have discovered that it is a strange, strong-willed man from a large house, a first-rate farmer and grazier that has taken to these night walkings. Another terror has come after it, and women will not, men care not to meet on lonely road, by solitary field stile, or on sedgy common the big, stalwart man who looks so absorbed and uncanny. They ask if he is so far himself as to be lawfully at large. They

murmur that it is not right that poor folk should run the risk of being frightened out of their seven senses if they want to go out after sundown. Peasants say, "Summat'll happen." Gentlefolks ask if something should not be done?

Sir Montford Tandem, over their wine, has told Squire A. about a big man appearing suddenly at the leader's head as his cart entered the wood by Broome Hurst. "Ged, I never was so frightened before." John, coachman to the wealthy Misses B., has told his stable-help that he was "quite funky, froze like when a tree-men-jious giant, with a black face, looked at him over the off mare's head in that nasty bit where you turn out of Dungeon Plantation." People have watched a figure standing by the still, moveless Waveney, where it was deepish, looking down into those reedy waters as if contemplating something; have watched, under cover of the wood, anticipating some terrible end to the long gaze, and gone away turning their private thoughts into public scandal. But, if sensation has been a-simmer during this last winter outside, it has been getting

almost to boiling point inside Dewey Manor

Biddy, now much stiffer in the joints and redder in the nose, has been the only servant that would stay amid all those wanderings up and down the house at unseasonable hours. As late as one o'clock, as early as four A.M., has Mr. Mumford been astir. Why and wherefore, what to do or to purpose, nobody can tell. Biddy has stood on guard, so to speak, over "the mistress," and those three young ladies, "the darlints," whom we have seen as children under her care.

She has watched him out and in, and listened when he went to his bed—he has slept alone for some time—ere she has allowed herself rest. Poor Biddy ! she has had a hard time of it, self-chosen and silently borne, and she has been very loyal, and in her own way—when she was Biddy solus, and not Biddy plus something else—very helpful, very comforting during these darkening seasons. One piece of loyalty has not, perhaps, increased her mistress's comfort, that wherein she has confessed to her about the packet which poor Mr. Chapman had out of his trunk to peruse, and died with under his pillow

unread : ominous packet, since gone, whither she knew not, in that leather portmanteau with the Chapman wardrobe. But other more tangible troubles have dwarfed this one, while not altogether obliterating its features. Mrs. Mumford has kept up wonderfully during these last trying years since she met Smith on the Long Green, supported by the interest of her budding daughters, the love of poor folk, and the respect of rich yeoman and squire around. Her health has never failed, because she has always fought annoyance with pre-occupation, and set blessing over against loss or lack. Her cheek has whitened, her manner stilled, and her brow has almost seemed to work with thought in the eyes of dependents appealing for direction or instruction. Yes, a more mental life and an absorbed, a life more pale lipped and pensive, but still a life with the motherly and its solitudes always callable to the surface, has been this little woman's ; a life stayed up ever on a deep sense of innocence, whatever may be the sin which lies at their door through *him*. He may have said once to "evil, be thou my good," as she believes that he has long since said to his in-

most spirit, "Trust not in a friend, and put not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom;" but her heart has been kept free, and her soul clear by waiting on God.

To-day she has made one more of those many attempts to know what his trouble is, and how he has discharged that one claim which has stood like a bar betwixt them and pure conubial confidence. He has been very violent, very abusive, very denying of the faintest scrap of marital trust and troth. It has been too much for the little woman, and she has gone to bed with a sick headache. To-night he has gone down by those back-stairs which the servants use, and through the passages into the accommodation road by the little holm along the low-lying meadows.

A fair young girl from her boudoir watches him pass under the moon's rays among the squat bushes. How like her mother in her quiet thoughtfulness, her large brow, her placid eye, her stilled manner, her slight form. He comes in at length, and this girl of nineteen follows him, after a pause, into his study, where

he is found pacing up and down, as he has been most of the day, talking aloud.

"Sylvester Chapman, ha! ha! ha! I beat him once, and I'll beat him again. He wrote to me again through his lawyer, when that boy must have come of age, saying a Mr. Blyth had died, and that, on becoming his executor, he found reference among his papers to this young man, and he wanted to know something about him. I outflanked 'em easily enough then; ay, and *this* letter"—striking it in his palm angrily—"may hint what it likes. Let 'em find the heir. Ha! ha! ha! That's beaten me, and it'll beat them. Then he's to be proved legitimate, and Sylvester Chapman is an outsider, with no *locus standi*. Besides, we can cause his family pride and honour to forbid him to move in the case of a bastard. Yes, I've a strong line of battle against attack from that quarter."

Pausing.

"I wonder if he really knows anything about this boy? Tut, tut. It's only revenge. He got bilked of his bride, and he can't let a chance pass of annoying a successful rival. Silly, silly fellow! If he only knew how much one woman

is like another, and all of 'em a pest and a bother, he'd keep quiet. Smith can't have found him out. Besides, Smith's in America. Mrs. Scaife couldn't sell him any papers. She lost 'em. That old parson couldn't do anything to stir things up, for he's long been dead. No, no, Sylvester, you are no more able to move with success in this business now than you were to influence your brother against me more than twenty years ago. I'll beat you, and your lawyer, too. Ha, ha, ha."

Standing still.

"I wish there was an end of it."

What a hollow, half-hearted laugh maugre the malice and triumph in it! The eye may glare with a boiled setness, yet the lower face plainly declares that it has taken bitter for sweet. What a sudden change of tone!

"Papa dearest, what troubles you? Are you not well?"

He stops, startled in that walk, which had almost a limp of lameness in it. He looks as scarcely comprehending the gentle vision in virgin white. The arm lifts to his neck with its soft muslin caress, the lips petition to his

cheek as he comes out of semi-dazement, looks down, and, comprehending, gives an impatient "Tut, tut, child," tossing the head in a tiff at interruption.

"Papa, what ails you?" says the strong love which will not be rebuffed. "What ails you? Sit down. You look tired."

She pulls his chair towards him, shakes up the cushion coaxingly, leads him to it, and kneels down beside him, looking lovingly up into his half comprehending face. He feels towards her waist with the left arm, and, understanding, she rises, and seats herself gently on his knee, pressing the warm, young face and vibrant curls to his wan cheek.

"Tell me, pa, what pains you?"

He has an answer of ailments, but none that her sympathy can heal. She whispers her little soothing thoughts. She is his favourite daughter that might always approach him when in his sternest and most taciturn moods, but her power to-night cannot uncurtain the thoughts which are secretly killing.

"Pa, do tell me what is the matter. It makes ma sad, Millie sad, Janet sad, and me sad to



see you so troubled and lonely, leaving us all the day to pine here, never coming into the drawing-room whoever may be staying with us."

A great sigh, as the worn face looks downwards, the cheeks and lips hanging flabbier than heretofore. The head sways wearily, even with all the witchery of that young heart so close, its pure feeling, its fresh hopes, its innocence, its tender sympathies waiting like fragrant tendrils to cling and bless. Ah! it is the ecstasy of subtle pain that these things can be seen, felt, possessed, and not enjoyed, for the gnawing dread that comes between.

"Papa, I go early to-morrow morning to Whittlemore, to mamma's old friends, the Wittons. Won't you tell me now what I can do to make you happier?"

"Nothing, nothing, but stay here."

"I will, pa. I'll go and tell Biddy to stop packing my box."

"No, no, child. You must go. I did not mean what I said. You must go."

"Pa, I won't go, if you will say that you'll be happier for my remaining at home."

"Go, love. I'll try to be happier here if you go, and Millie shall tell me how you get on. Young folks should take pleasure, for old folks can enjoy nothing."

"Then, pa, I'll stay, and grieve with you rather than pleasure with the Wittons."

No. She must go. He will be the happier to hear of her enjoyment, and it will cast its reflection upon him. Yes, she must go to Whittlemore to-morrow, as arranged.

"Won't you tell me, pa, what ails you?"

No, nothing ails him. Only his sciatica is very painful. He's getting old now, and old folks must bear pains if only to balance the pleasures of their young, foolish lives, long since worn out.

He will bid her good-bye to-night.

"Won't you tell me, pa, what troubles you?"

The gentle arm is round his neck, the tender, tearful eye glancing into his, the white-draped form clinging to the dark garb like innocence to hopelessness; but all in vain. He will confide nothing. He kisses the cherry lips, each damask cheek glowing with feeling, and lets her go. There are dim spots dulling the

virgin sheen of the girl's dress when she regains the drawing-room, tell-tales of silent tears.

## CHAPTER XX.

## PRISON AND A VISITOR.

“**M**AY it please your lordship. Gentlemen of the jury, the defendant, Eliza Scaife, is indicted for having feloniously conspired to make away with a young child, as you have heard, and I will prove, beyond all question, that she did not——”

The gentleman in horse-hair did nothing of the sort; he only managed to reduce the crime to a lower category, and the penalty to eighteen months' imprisonment.

Some years before, we have seen this woman living at Rotherford, and endeavouring to bring up that child Florence, to whom she had taken such a fancy, in a respectable walk of life. The girl had, in fact, become a schoolmistress in a contiguous village, and was much respected by

the clergyman there. They had lived quietly, getting an honest livelihood, these two, until this disaster fell upon them. Nemesis had come for a crime committed years before, and when men said it was too late as a punishment for past evil, and only a deterrent of present and prospective good in Mrs. Scaife herself. The girl felt the disgrace more than the woman's own children, and roused up, after the first shock, to such energy in providing the means of defence that she succeeded in mitigating the penalty very materially.

She had gone into Whittlemore to a solicitor named Witton, a hard-headed, shrewd man, and interested him so much in the case that he had worked on every possible point of the indictment and kept out much damaging evidence as irrelevant. The girl in her excitement, in her tender sympathy for this woman, had unconsciously added something to the rays of the golden hair, the blue eyes, the oval face, the bright, healthy complexion. This, of course, had had no effect upon a matter of fact bachelor of thirty-six, with a practical turn and a sarcastic power of expression. Solicitors work

for money, and this one did. The only sign of mitigation in him was that, when she had paid counsel's fees, he said he would not press her for his own bill. The counsel's fees were named, and made a prodigious hole in her quarter's salary, but, singularly enough, the lawyer's bill lingered on its way to the young teacher. Occasionally she had to see him, and he, so brisk in getting rid of his press of clients, generally found time to listen patiently to her feminine roundabout way of putting her case.

"Whenever you feel in any difficulty, Miss Scaife—by the way, you said Mrs. Scaife was not your mother. By what name shall I call you?"

"Oh, that will do, sir," Florence had said, blushing.

Mystery upon mystery about the girl, Mr. Witton had said to himself, and then finished his sentence.

"Well, if ever you need advice, come here. It will give me pleasure to serve you."

Curious to relate, this girl's cloud of hair and pleading eye lingered longer than more

important professional things in the lawyer's mind, and he always was at liberty when his clerk announced "Miss Scaife."

And Mrs. Scaife; how did she get on? Of course she bore the prison discipline and endured the prison fare, hard things at her time of life, as best she might; but they were not her heaviest care. Her load was in one sense lightened, for now the crime that had floated as an evil, airy spectre before her boding mind for long, had come in the tangible form of punishment, and dwarfed in mould while materialised somewhat in aspect. In another sense her burden was the heavier. She had much time to think of past sins, and one sin grew no lighter by being pondered over in that lonely cell. Had she done all that she could to right that affectionate girl who had been more helpful to her than her two daughters? Her conscience acquitted her of the charge of not seeking after the missing boy, but it did not commend everything else. It did not approve the reason why she had simply waited and watched for this girl, instead of doing and daring some-

thing in her behalf. True, without the boy it did not seem she could do much, and the implements with which she had in due time intended to work had been mysteriously stolen from her. But then this was only another reason for suspecting a grievous wrong was being done to the two children. It was a reason why she should have stirred the quiet waters, and, forgetting her own fears, have prospected what might be got by playing more vigorously on another person's. And yet she had not had a clear case altogether ; only surmises, but still of such a character as not only to justify action, but to incite it. When she got out of prison, she said to herself, she would do something. She did something in the meantime. She wrote to Mrs. Smart, the milk-woman, requesting a visit, but that lady said to her friends that *she* "warn't going to visit a prisoner;" and to Mrs. Scaife and Florence that Lancaster was so far from Whittlemore that she couldn't go there.

But Mrs. Scaife received a visit she did not request.

A big, feeble man came, fat, and breathing



asthmatically, along the close passages. His lower face was covered with a great muffler, and he walked with a faltering, uncertain step into the cell. She flushed at the apparition, and glared as the second glance drew him into recognition.

"Eliza," he began, very gaspingly and palpitatingly, "I was so sorry to hear of your being in this place that I have come to say so."

"You lie, John Dacre Mumford. You are sorry for your own reasons that I am going to get out."

"Oh! Eliza——"

"Mrs. Scaife, if you please, sir."

"Oh! Mrs. Scaife, if so you will it, you are as hot and unjust as ever. What interest can I have? What," he said, with a little feeble deprecation, a little senile snivel,—“what but pity could bring me here, when so poorly, to see you?”

"Nothing but self-interest ever would have brought you."

"Eli—Mrs. Scaife, I mean, have you no pity for a poor man, much broken in health, and, I fear, utterly in fortune? Look at me."

"Look at me, John Mumford. Should I ever have been here, if your falsehood had not brought me to the want that made me commit crime to get my fatherless children bread? Would you ever? did you ever put forth a finger to help me until you wanted something out of me? Let us have no cant now, sir. Say what you want at once, and begone."

"Oh dear, oh dear," he sighed out, feebly, "I'm not fit for this encounter, but you might have some reason."

"Have you advanced anything as yet to exercise reason upon? What does the man want? Is he becoming a whining dotard?" she cried, with scorn in eye, in voice, on lip, and flushing face.

"Eliza——"

"If I hear that word again, I'll——" and she rose, menacing like a fury over him.

"Well, Mrs. Scaife. I ask again, have you no pity? I'm a poor, broken man, swindled out of my Australian property."

"Swindling's like chickens and curses, come home to roost."

"I'm broken in health and means, and must

soon die. Can you not have some mercy, and hear what I have come to say?"

"Say on," she said, with sullen brow, "and cut it short."

"I want, Mrs. Scaife, to do an act of justice. Where is that boy I committed to your hands?"

"Did I not tell you I do not know? Why do you want him?"

"I can tell him of something to his advantage."

"And yours, too," she replied, with a sneer. "But why don't you ask about the girl?"

"The boy is all important. If he cannot be found, then I shall, in time, want her. But the boy is everything."

"And what do you want with him?"

"I cannot tell you that as yet."

"Then I'll tell you. You have been keeping him out of his property, and trouble is coming to you for your crime."

"No, no. You don't know that."

"But I do. Didn't I read the documents?"

"Then you told me a lie, when you said you never got that packet of papers."

"I did, in a good cause. I meant to bring you before this to your account-giving."

"But you can't prove what you say. Nobody would believe you."

"And why? You sent a thief into my house to steal them, as you very well know."

"But she didn't steal all."

"*She!* Ah! I've caught you. It was a woman that did it. Well, never mind how much she did steal, or she didn't. That's my affair."

"But, Eliza, if you've got any of them, I'll pay you well for them."

"I'll sell you nothing. This," she cried, looking round at the bare prison walls, "is what comes of having dealings with such as you."

"You do me wrong. I want to right things."

"John Dacre Mumford, they *will* be righted, mind that. But what were you righting when you were bribing me, in an underhand way, to destroy these children? Making it my interest, by giving a lump sum of money with them, to get rid of them and trouble all at once. Ay, and robbing them even of their very names until they should be put out of the way."

"Oh! no, I never did that."

"Liar! You did."

"For shame, Eli—that is, Mrs. Scaife,"—as he saw her at the word rise as if for violence. "Did I not take a note from you promising careful cherishing, and vouching to produce them in health whenever I should require them?"

"Yes, you did, and you never meant to require them. It was a coward's way of covering himself at the expense of his victims."

"Oh! Mrs. Scaife! oh! Mrs. Scaife!" and he held up his hands, as if utterly shocked.

"And, Mumford," she said, with incisive insinuating bitterness, "you thought in the same vein to get those documents into your hands to rob those poor children of their all, when you couldn't take their lives. You want to buy now what you think will serve yourself at their cost. You stole, through that woman, what you got."

"No. Never. I never stole them."

"Yes, thief, you did. But, mark, you stole and you didn't steal; because you couldn't steal my memory and intelligence with these

documents. Everything in them was carefully abstracted. There's quite enough yet in my hands in black and white, Mumford," she exclaimed, with a malicious laugh, "to put the avengers on the scent in that time which is coming on so fast."

The man sat with open, helpless mouth and wandering eye. None of the high, ringing voice, the crushing, forceful manner, the cold, imperturbable look, meeting, to her astonishment, the outpour of these vials of long hoarded hate. Far otherwise. In plaintive, semi-crying, senile, almost whining tones, he asked if she wouldn't have pity upon his poor girls and himself, an impoverished man?

"Never!" she screeched, with a vindictive stamp of her foot. "Never. We'll have justice, and you shall have it too, you heartless wretch."

"Eliza—Mrs. Scaife—oh! think of my impoverishment."

"Impoverishment, forsooth! You will be rich as long as roguery pays, else I might think of your family."

"Time's up," cried a gruff voice, as a knock at the door was heard.

"Yes, and your time will soon be up, scoundrel."

Her clenched fist was in his face as the officer entered.

"Begone to your doom, and may it be as vile as your heart. Take him out, warder, and let this moral skunk come here no more. The sight of him scorches my very eyeballs. Next time to see is to kill."

What meant she? The man stared at her. Her eyes seemed to blaze on both, and a nimbus of single hairs appeared to lift in her passion about her brow, as if great electric batteries were charging her with their tempest fluid.

The officer was astonished. The matron had said that she had been so quiet and good as a prisoner. He led the big, bewildered man panting out as the female warder entered.

"It seems to me as how she's one too many for you, sir. Who'd ha' thought she was sitch a tiger! But then women—" and he shook his head, and went silently on his way, for rumour said he was married, very much married indeed.

Mr. Mumford endeavoured, notwithstanding what had happened, to obtain another interview. He had an idea that he had managed badly, and still might hedge with her about the girl, making offers somehow still unmade; but prisoner and magistrate alike sternly refused, and he went thence a beaten, down-hearted man.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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